Igor Smirnov

Champion Psychology

Remote Chess Academy

chess-teacher.com

First published in 2015 by Remote Chess Academy.

Copyright © 2015 Remote Chess Academy

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

ISBN 9 781942 104353

All other sales enquiries should be directed to Remote Chess Academy
email: support@chess-teacher.com
website: http://chess-teacher.com

About
The Author

Igor Smirnov is a chess Grandmaster, coach, and holder of a Master's degree in psychology.

He's the founder of the "Remote Chess Academy" company that has helped thousands of students worldwide to improve their results.

GM Smirnov has developed lots of chess video lessons, articles, webinars and training courses, including the famous courses "The Grandmaster's Secrets", "The Grandmaster's Positional Understanding", and "Calculate Till Mate".

You can follow his blogs and social media sites from below links:

/RemoteChessAcademy/

http://chess-teacher.com

/+GMIgorSmirnov/

/user/GMIgorSmirnov

/GM_Smirnov/

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 5

2. MAGIC PILLS 7
Magic Pills for top performance. 8
Anand's advice: "Take one game at a time". 9
Smyslov's advice: Your task is to play 40 good moves. 11
Gligoric's advice: "I play against pieces". 12
Aronian's advice: "Press your opponent with instant opening play". 14
Be a legendary player! 17

3. DECISION MAKING 19
How to calculate variations quickly? 20
It's BAD to be perfect. 23
How to use your intuition?. 26
Firm determination. 29
Making the right decisions, right on time!. 32

4. OPPONENTS 35
Opponents: "operating instructions". 36
Your opponent's view. 38
Beating weaker opponents. 42
Beating stronger opponents 46
Impolite advice 49

5. YOUR GOALS 51
Worship of the milestones. 52
What's your real goal?. 55
Unshakable confidence. 57
Training goals. 61
What obstructs 95% of players?. 63
How to ACTUALLY achieve your goals?. 68

6. CHAMPION SPIRIT 73
Champion Psychology from the Martial Arts. 74
Chicken moves 77
Dealing with failure in the manner of a champion. 80
TALENT. 87
Why do kids progress faster?. 95
Have fun! 99

7. MAKING BEST USE OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE 104
8. GAMES 107
9. USEFUL RESOURCES. 111

Introduction

The world is a tragedy to those who feel,
but a comedy to those who think.
Horace Walpole

I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions.
I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them.
Oscar Wilde

I once saw statistics about the most stressful sporting activities. I was really surprised to see chess in second place (next to sky jumping)!

Strong emotions "energize" a human, supporting intense physical activity. It used to be fighting or running away for the generations of our ancestors. That's the way prescribed by nature.

However, in the modern world, this logical scheme has become broken. For instance, you may have stress in your work but normally don't "fight or run away".

We experience the same psychological pressure while playing chess. You must stay focused and do your best. You know that even one mistake can lead to a loss. At the same time, you have to sit calmly and think hard.

This psychological pressure can harm your normal thinking and lead to lots of typical problems:

- Strong emotions don't let you stay focused (and may lead to blunders).
- You may get tired faster.
- You may start checking the variations more than once (which will lead to time trouble).
- And the list goes on…

That's why, strangely and unfortunately, your performance in an important tournament battle may be worse than in a friendly game…

So, how to get rid of nervousness, fears and psychological pressure?

The bad news: there's no way to do so.

There's a psychological joke:

"Try not to think about a green monkey".

It's simply impossible to do so. If you try to *"not think about a monkey",* then a monkey is exactly what you are thinking about.

Another good analogy is the question,

"How to get rid of darkness in a room"?

There's no way to get rid of darkness, but instead you can turn on the light.

We may also recollect famous warriors of the past. They put their lives on the line many times without any fear.

Did they find a secret pill against fear?

No, they set their minds to something else instead. Some of them had religious motifs, while others were protecting their families or stayed true to high ideals of freedom, honor, etc.

Whatever the truth may be, great warriors have set their minds to something important and meaningful to them. This great IDEA has filled their mind, not leaving any free space for other thoughts and emotions to creep in.

Luckily, we are in a much more comfortable situation now. Even if your king gets killed (which is the original meaning of "checkmate"), there's no danger to your own life.

Therefore, it's definitely possible to stay cool, play well and enjoy the royal game of chess.

There's no way to get rid of nervousness. And there's no need for that. Instead, you just need to set your mind to the right things.

What are these "right things"?

We'll talk about that in the next chapters!

"Congratulations! You've just won a special free bonus!"

Handling emotions during a chess game is just the same as in any other life situation. Therefore, after reading this book, you'll be able to realize your full potential in chess,as well as in other areas of your life.

MAGIC PILLS

Chapter 1
Magic Pills for top performance

People have always been tempted to discover "magic pills". I'm talking about a certain solution that can be applied easily and bring you great results.

For instance, the inventor of alcohol probably thought that he had discovered a cure for all diseases☺.

Now we know it's rather the opposite.

Generations of alchemists wasted their lives searching for an easy way to get rich – finding the way to convert anything into gold.

However, some "magic pills" do exist. For instance, there are special techniques that help you overcome nervousness and bring you into the most optimum condition.

I'll share several "psychological magic pills" with you in this chapter. They have proved their effectiveness, both in the games of my students and some of the world's top players.

Nevertheless, I'd like to warn you: as with ordinary pills, "magic pills" haveone major drawback – they cure symptoms. The real cause of the disease will remain intact and keep causing similar trouble in the future.

In the other chapters of this book, we'll talk about those core elements of your champion psychology. It will give you a rock-solid foundation for permanent success.

Still, sometimes you need an urgent solution, and a "magic pill" can give it to you. For instance, you are about to play an important tournament game and are feeling nervous. Hence, you need to bring yourself to your best psychological condition – and you need to do so right now.

I'll give you some "magic pills" for that.

Are you intrigued? Then let's go ahead and get started!

Chapter 2

Anand's advice: "Take one game at a time"

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew,
When I bit off more than I could chew.
Frank Sinatra

When Viswanathan Anand played his second World Championship match against Norwegian star Magnus Carlsen, the reporters asked him tons of questions like:

- *"Does your win in this game raise your confidence for winning the match"?*
- *"How do you plan to shorten the gap in the score"?*
- *"Do you think this match will be different to your first match"?*

In reply to all those various questions, Anand used to answer:

"I take one game at a time".

This is an extremely wise approach indeed!

People always think about their future. We set goals, hope for something, worry about potential troubles, etc.

Imagine you are playing in a tournament and have scored highly in the first rounds. Now there are only a few games left. You know that you are very close to overall success. In such a situation, you naturally start hoping for a good overall result, a rise in your rating, prizes, etc. and

this is the worst thing you can do!

Strong players know that this almost guarantees failure. Firstly, you switch your focus from chess to something else. Secondly, you put extra psychological pressure on yourself. This is a proven recipe for failure! A LOT of players have fallen into this trap…

Instead, you should adopt Anand's advice. He has won championship titles in almost all possible formats and his experience is unquestioned.

Take one game at a time. In any case, that's the only thing you CAN

do. People can focus on one particular thing only at any given moment.

If you don't think so, then you can do a quick test. Put two papers in front of you. Take a pen in each hand. Draw a triangle on one paper and a square on the other. The key point: you have to draw with both hands, simultaneously.

Were you able to do so? Come on! Can't you draw a square?

Are you serious? ☺

Ok, I'm kidding. Nobody can perform this task. Again, you can't concentrate your attention on different things at the same time. Even a juggler has to focus on each SINGLE object at every given moment in time (he just switches attention from one object to another very quickly).

To conclude: take one game at a time. Throw away any other thoughts. Focus on your current game. This is your only immediate task. Keep your focus and do so well. That's it.

CONCLUSION:

Adopt the magical pill from Viswanathan Anand:

Take one game at a time.

Chapter 3

Smyslov's advice: Your task is to play 40 good moves

Here's another magic pill from the seventh champion of the world, Vasily Smyslov:

"I'm going to play 40 good moves. If my opponent is able to do the same – that'll be a draw".

What did he mean by that?

Your task for a game is to play 40 good moves. If your opponent makes a mistake – you'll win.If your opponent makes 40 good moves as well – it'll be a draw.

This is an extremely realistic approach, formulated in a crystal-clear way. It keeps everything simple for you.

If you find yourself thinking about the result of an upcoming game, your opponent or anything else – just recollect Smyslov's advice. Your task for a game is to play 40 good moves. That's it.

Why was he talking about 40 moves?

I guess, it's simply because that's the average duration of a chess game. Even if a certain game takes longer, often one side is already enjoying a decisive advantage by this point.

Smyslov has formulated this so clearly that it does not require many explanations, really. Just grab this magic pill and make use of it!

CONCLUSION:

"I'm going to play 40 good moves. If my opponent is able to do the same – that'll be a draw".

Your task for a game is to play 40 good moves. That's it.

Chapter 4
Gligoric's advice: "I play against pieces"

There are a few common annoying situations for chess players. While playing against a weaker opponent, you may relax somewhat and overlook something.

While facing a stronger opponent, you might start getting nervous, playing too cautiously, etc.

How to face such situation?

How to keep your performance at the top level, regardless of the opponent?

In other chapters, we'll discuss the specific chess techniques you should be using. Right now, however, grab a "magic pill" from a legendary player, Svetozar Gligoric.

His approach was very straight forward: *"I play against pieces"*.

This means you should think about a position and play the best move you can find –no matter whether your opponent is a beginner or a world champion; no matter whether your move is risky, calm or whatever. You just think about a given position and play the move you consider to be the best.

You "play the board, not the man". This approach helps you literally to put aside any psychological issues.

This is how a computer program plays chess. It always looks for the best move and plays it. It does not "care" if it's winning or losing, who the opponent is, etc. Quite simply, it always plays the best move it can find. Modern computers have reached a fantastic 3000+ rating; hopefully you can do the same.

Frankly speaking, *"playing against pieces"* is not the most powerful technique. However, it's much better than cracking under psychological pressure.

As we discussed at the very beginning, "magic pills" are powerful yet rather temporary solutions. You may take pills from time to time, but don't get addicted to them. In other chapters, we'll discuss more profound ideas regarding your opponents.

Still, “playing against pieces” allowed Gligoric to become one of the world’s best players in the 1950s and 1960s. It’s not that bad, is it?

CONCLUSION:

If you find yourself getting nervous about your opponent, recollect Gligoric’s advice: you are playing against White (or Black) pieces.

You should think about a position and play the move you consider to be the best. Put everything else aside: play like a computer.

Chapter 5
Aronian's advice: "Press your opponent with instant opening play"

In previous chapters, we've been talking about YOUR psychological condition. This time we'll discuss

how to shake your opponent's confidence?

Nowadays, there's a vast amount of opening theory. Computers provide huge databases of games in any possible opening. Players analyze their favorite lines with computer programs, finding lots of powerful novelties, plans, etc.

In addition to that, any serious chess player prepares for games against his upcoming opponents. Detecting an opponent's weaknesses, preparing specific opening lines – this is the usual arsenal in a player's pre-game preparation.

Therefore, it's really unpleasant to face an opponent's opening preparation. In this case, in fact, you are playing not against your opponent but against his computer (which has a frightening 3200 rating!).

Aronian uses the following idea to confuse his opponents.

Here's his advice:

If you know the opening theory, play these moves INSTANTLY. Expose great confidence in your moves (in your home preparation). Sit straight, keep your head high – you may even stare into the eyes of your opponent.

This bold style of playing confuses your opponent. He was sitting, calculating variations, and once he plays a move – you reply in one second! When this happens for a few moves in a row.
It confuses your opponent greatly. He feels like you know everything, like you have analyzed at home everything he can play.

Your opponent starts having the following doubts:

- "What if this opening line is bad for me"?
- "What if he has prepared a certain powerful idea against me"?
- "Should I try to play some ridiculous moves to deviate from his opening preparation"?
- "Gosh, I'm playing against his computer"!

When your opponent is having doubts, it undermines his confidence. The key point here is to make your moves INSTANTLY, with no thinking at all.

You are "pressing" your opponent.

This concept works especially well when your opponent does not know this opening line and thinks independently. In this case, he will be unsure if his moves are fine. Most importantly, he will be afraid that you will exploit any inaccuracy of his.

Your opponent will be afraid to play the most natural moves, because you most likely have analyzed them.

Here's the trick: maybe you have not prepared anything that special. Maybe your opening line gives you only a little advantage or even an approximately equal position. BUT your opponent does NOT know that!

When he faces your instant moves, your confident look – he gets the impression that you have prepared a BOMB against him. He starts getting worried and may do something dumb.

Here's another trick: you may use this "pressing method", <u>even if you don't know this opening line!</u>

When your opponent is considering his move, you may think about the position as well. Often you can guess the opponent's next move and prepare your reply.

Once your opponent has made his move, you make your reply INSTANTLY. It gives the impression that you are playing unthinkingly, that you have prepared this line at home (even though it's NOT true).

That's how you dupe your opponent, making "a poker face" with weak cards. The reason is still the same: you are confusing your op-

ponent. He may play some ridiculous moves, trying to avoid your opening preparation (not knowing that there's no preparation☺).

Frankly, I'm not sure if even Aronian is the first one who used this method. A couple of top Grandmasters use it too. Anyway, the method is good and you are welcome to adopt it yourself.

CONCLUSION:

Use Aronian's advice: "PRESS" your opponent with INSTANT opening moves. Demonstrate absolute confidence in your moves, in your home preparation. This confuses your opponent a lot, no matter whether you have truly prepared something or not.

Chapter 6
Be a legendary player!

"Use past achievements to fuel future success."
Stefan Wissenbach

"Praise yourself daringly, something always sticks."
Francis Bacon

There are books about almost every one of the famous chess players of the past. Perhaps you've observed the collections of the best games played by Capablanca, Fischer and other great champions.

Now you have a unique chance to stand in line with those great guys! Why should you wait for someone to do this job for you? Just go ahead and make a legend of yourself!

Well, I'm kidding – but only for a bit. On a serious note, I do recommend that you create a collection of your best winning games.

Why should you do so?

Usually we pay more attention to the games we lose. One of the best ways to improve is to analyze your games (especially the losing ones), detect errors and improve your skills in related areas.

Moreover, psychological research suggests that people remember negative facts about their lives eight times more strongly than positive ones.
When everything is fine, we consider it a "NORMAL" situation and often don't pay much attention to it.

However, when things turn bad, we start worrying about this and that, and that we have to make efforts to correct the problem and so forth.
This situation negatively affects your self-confidence, making it lower than it should be!
How to correct this?

Create a database of your best winning games. Review your past

games and select the best ones. This will form a collection of your best achievements.

Whenever you play a good game (no matter if it's an official tournament or just a blitz game with your friend) – add it to the database of your best games.

It's really easy to create this collection of your games and it's a very joyful process!

Now we come to the most important part:

how to use this collection?

You should review some of these games before your upcoming game.
You may spend just five minutes before a game to review "your immortals".

- This will put your mind on the right path.
- It'll raise your self-confidence, you'll see how many times you have surprised strong players in the past and you'll know that you can do so again today.
- Apart from the psychological effect, it has some chess-related value as well.
- In the past, you've probably experimented with different plans, ideas, etc.
- Reviewing your best games helps you to stay in line with your BEST STYLE.

CONCLUSIONS:

Make a legendary player of yourself! Take the first important step right now: turn on your computer and create a database of your best winning games.

Don't forget to spend five minutes on reviewing these examples before your next chess battles. You'll notice the difference!

DECISION MAKING

Chapter 7
How to calculate variations quickly?

I've decided to write this book in reply to the students' questions I've received through the website http://chess-teacher.com

Although there are numerous questions, many of them are similar. Here's maybe the most popular topic:

"Another most common problem: double checking of variations, even simple variations, leading to time trouble at the end of the game. I mean, how to avoid doubting our own calculation and save time on the clock? "

Vignesh

There are a few aspects here. The first one is the calculation skill itself. In order to calculate variations quickly and properly, you need to possess this skill.

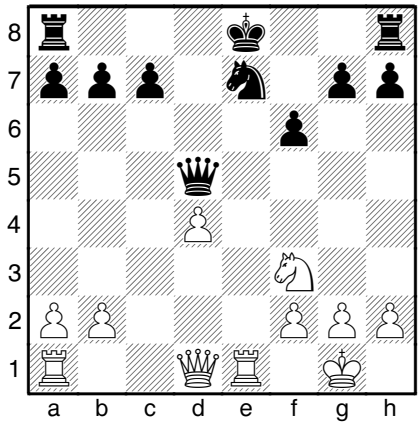
Let me highlight once again that calculation is a SKILL. As with any other skill (like writing, riding a bicycle, etc.), you should LEARN how to do it and then TRAIN in performing it for some time.

Everything is pretty straightforward here. All that you need to get this skill is covered in my course "Calculate till Mate" (http://chess-teacher.com/product/calculate-till-mate/).

Apart from the calculation technique, there are a few other issues that are little trickier.

Let's discuss them now.

Steinitz – Von Bardeleben



White's Turn

Let's say you are playing this game. It's White to move and you need to find the right decision.

White's position looks promising, with the Black king stuck in the center. So you are hoping to find the move that will bring you closer to victory. Of course, you want to make sure that your following move works well and does not have any flaws.

The problem is: The position is complex and it's hard to calculate variations until a clear result.

Should you play a move without being aware of the consequences?

That sounds uncomfortable. You would certainly prefer to calculate the lines further and get PROOF that your move is really good. Then you would play it with confidences.

The problem is:

The position is complex and it's hard to calculate variations until a clear result…

- The circle has closed up.
- There's no way to escape from it.

Therefore, you will think hard, spend time, but will not come up with anything substantial anyway.

After some time, you will look at the clock and think:

"Gosh, I've wasted so much time, I've got to move now"!

Then you'll play a move which is often far from being the best…

Does this situation seem familiar to you? Don't worry, we've all been there.

As you can see, the most natural way does NOT work. You should adopt another approach.

Let me tell you an interesting fact about the position we've been talking about. This game was played back in 1895 and has been considered as a masterpiece by Steinitz. By the way, he played a natural move, 15.Qe2.

Later on, a couple of the world's top players were analyzing this game. Some improvements were found for both sides. In 1973 (78 years later!!), Igor Zaitsev came up with the move 15.Qa4, which is now considered to be the best. However, who knows? Maybe in the year 2200 a new super-computer will prove that another move is better…

We have to admit that often you CANNOT calculate the lines and get proof that your intended move is really the best. Sometimes it's very hard to foresee all the consequences. That's life.

Therefore,

It's FINE to play a move, even when you are unsure about the consequences.

There's NO need to think further, calculate the variations, recheck the variations, etc. Again, chess (same as with life) is a complex thing. Usually it's impossible to predict and control all the consequences. Luckily, this is unnecessary for us.

Remember, your task is "TO PLAY GOOD MOVES" – and that's it.

There's another great idea to keep in mind. Chess is a logical game. If you play the right moves, your position will be good. Even if you can't calculate the lines until the end, you may be confident in your position. If you play the right moves (the moves that follow chess principles) – your position can't be bad.

What chess principles should you follow?

That's a separate topic: you can learn it into my course "The Grandmaster's Positional Understanding": http://chess-teacher.com/product/the-grandmasters-positional-understanding

Although you can't foresee all the consequences of your move, of course you don't want to make an obvious blunder. For instance, if your move lets your opponent capture your pawn/piece within the next few moves –most likely that's a bad idea for you.

How can you prevent blunders?

There's a simple anti-blunder technique, and it only requires a few seconds. Check my FREE lesson about it here: http://chess-teacher.com/how-to-eliminate-blunders/

CONCLUSIONS

- It's FINE to play a move, even when you are unsure about the consequences
- If you play the right moves, your position will be good.
- Use the anti-blunder technique to verify your move within a few seconds. If it's not a blunder – you may go ahead and play it.

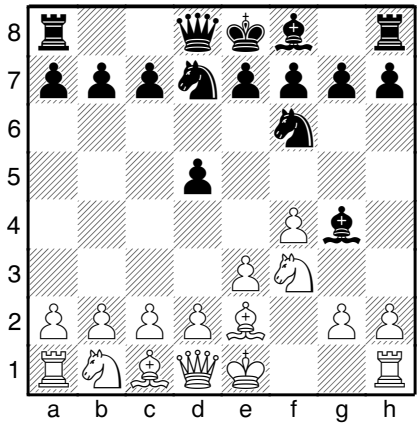
Chapter 8
It's BAD to be perfect

Sometimes, there are a few potential moves, with each of them looking fine. You may spend a lot of time trying to detect the BEST option. This is really harmful!

If you look at an analysis of a chess game between two of the world's best players – you'll often see a couple of mistakes made by both players throughout the game.

If you take a look at your own game, the quantity of errors will probably be much higher. Hence, the evaluation of a position will be changing many times during a single game.

Vovk – Kramnik



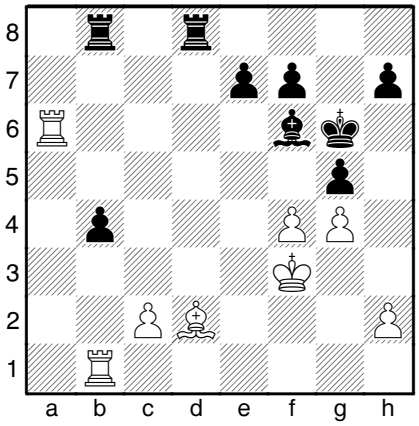
White to move

In this position, the White player has taken 11 minutes to play the move 5.Ne5. Indeed, White had a few other alternatives as well: castling, Nc3, b3, etc. Is this choice critical?

Although it may lead to different plans, the position remains approximately equal in any case. Again, if you play the right moves, your position will be fine. So far both players have made logical moves, and therefore the position is about equal.

From this point of view, White's choice on the 5th move does NOT affect the final result of the game really.

What does affect it? Let's take a look.



White to move

It's the same game, move 27. Now the position is really sharp and requires a lot of calculation. However, White had only four minutes left at this moment. He played the move 27.Rb4 quickly and lost the game afterwards. The right move, 27.Bb4 (threatening Be7), would lead to a draw.

Now, when he knows the whole scenario of the game, let me ask you:

Did it make sense for the White player to think for 11 minutes on the 5th move?

Of course not. Those 11 minutes could have been spent at the end of the game to find a drawish continuation.

In "the ideal world", you would wish to play the best moves all the time. However, in a real game this is unachievable.

With that being said, your actual goal for the game is NOT to play the best moves all the time. Rather, it's to play normal moves, avoiding huge errors.

Therefore, it makes no sense to spend time on selecting the best move out of a few approximately equal alternatives. Just play any of them.

Now let's analyze the situation a little more deeply.

The title of this chapter is"It's BAD to be perfect". This idea may sound strange to you. Why is that so?

The habit of perfectionism has been developed in our school age. If you make an error, you do not pass an exam. In order to get "A" marks, you should be flawless and perform everything perfectly.

We've been into this approach for many years of our school/university education. It has developed this habit of thinking for us. However, when we face real life – perfectionism simply does not work.

- The best soccer players score many goals, but they miss the mark even more often.
- Famous singers usually have "the hit of the season" and … a lot of mediocre songs.
- Entrepreneurs are famous for their successful businesses; what is less known is how many times their other endeavors have failed.

The key to success is to be energetic, work hard and keep trying.

Soichiro Honda (who established "Honda") formulated it as:

"Success is 99% failure".

So, it's not about being perfect. It's about moving forward, keeping pushing. Will you make errors in the process? For sure! And it's totally fine – it's a natural part of the process.

Here's what *Mark Zuckerberg* wrote about Facebook culture:

"We have the words 'Done is better than perfect' painted on our walls to remind ourselves to always keep shipping".

What's the conclusion? You need to turn off your perfectionism. You don't need to be perfect and make everything right. This is unachievable. It holds you back, restricting your progress.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Your goal is to play normal moves, avoiding huge errors.
- Do NOT spend much time trying to figure out the best move when there are a few relatively equal options.
- Turn off your perfectionism. You need to go forward and keep pushing, while errors are a normal part of this process.

Chapter 9
How to use your intuition?

The only real valuable thing is intuition.
Albert Einstein

Would you be thrilled to get a magic tool for making correct decisions instantly, without any effort? If so, let me congratulate you! You have this tool already, and it is your intuition.

Talking about a chess game, "INTUITION" is **the first move that comes to your mind when you look at the board**. It's your first intention, before any calculations, etc.

Should you use intuition? Definitely! This is a very powerful and effective tool, greatly underestimated by the majority of players.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that you follow intuition blindly. You need to verify your idea, making sure it does work well. I'll give you an exact guide soon. But first, let's talk about intuition itself.

How can you know the right move without any real thinking?

As you are aware, your mind controls a LOT of processes simultaneously: your breathing, movement, analysis of sounds and situations around you, and tons of other things. At the same time, you normally (consciously) think about a certain single topic solely. All other mind operations are going on in the background, but they ARE STILL GOING ON and you can make use of their results.

In general, this is how your intuition works. Let me emphasize that this is a really POWERFUL tool. Some scientists state that the quantity of neuron connections in your brain is equal to the quantity of atoms in the Universe!

It would be silly NOT to use such a tremendous resource, wouldn't it?

Now let's talk about a chess game more specifically.

How to make use of your intuition?

After your opponent has made a move, you should look at the board and NOTICE your initial intention.

Which move came to your mind before anything else?

Remember this move.

Does it mean this idea is the best? Not necessarily. Your intuition suggests the best move to you based on your current knowledge. For instance, if you do not know "the fork" motif, you can't find it intuitively.

Intuition is the best move that YOU can find based on your current chess knowledge. Still, it is not necessarily the best move in a position. That's why you need to verify your intuition. Here's what you should do during a chess game:

1. After your opponent has made a move, you should look at the board and NOTICE your initial intention.

2. Then you apply your usual thinking process (calculation, planning, etc.).

Why do you need Item 1 (intuition) in this scheme?

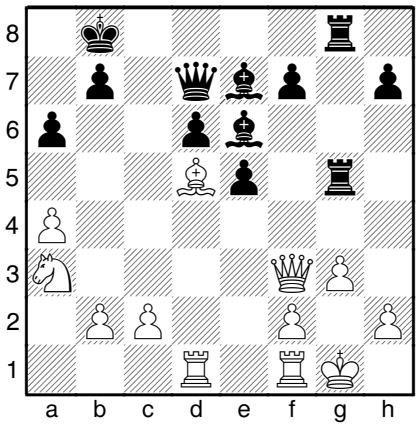
It helps in two main ways:

- If there are a few approximately equal alternatives – and you are not sure which one to choose – go for the one that was suggested by your intuition.

- As we discussed before, often you can't calculate the lines accurately until a clear result. Nevertheless, if the move was approved by your intuition – you may play it with confidence.

In both cases, intuition helps you save a lot of time and effort. In an uncertain situation, you will be able to play a sound move confidently (even if you can't calculate all the consequences).

Smirnov - Manesku



White to move

The first move that came to my mind here was 21.Nc4. I took note of it and then started to think normally. The problem with 21.Nc4 is that Black can answer with 21… Bg4, winning the exchange. Alternatively, Black can grab the a4-pawn.

Apart from 21.Nc4, White has a

few other alternatives: Qb3, Rd3, Be6. I tried to calculate it for some time, but the lines are complex and it was hard to come to a clear conclusion.

What do players do in such situations?

They try to think harder, check the lines again, aiming to detect the best move.

Instead, I knew that when you can't analyze everything logically, you should follow your intuition. So I simply played my very first intention: 21.Nc4. The move indeed turned out to be good and I won the game afterwards.

You've just observed intuitive decision making in a practical game. Lots of people don't really understand how intuition works, and therefore they neglect this powerful tool. Instead, you can adopt this new technique, making your decision making both simple and effective.

CONCLUSIONS:

Intuition is a VERY powerful tool. In chess, intuition suggests the best move that YOU can find.

<u>Guide for a chess game:</u>

1. After your opponent has made a move, you should look at the board and NOTICE your initial intention.

2. Then you apply your usual thinking process.

   - If you can detect the best move – play it.
   - In case Item 2 does not bring you a clear result, you may simply play the intuitive move (from Item 1).

Chapter 10
Firm determination

"One should make his decisions
within the space of seven breaths...
It is a matter of being determined and
having the spirit to break right through to the other side".

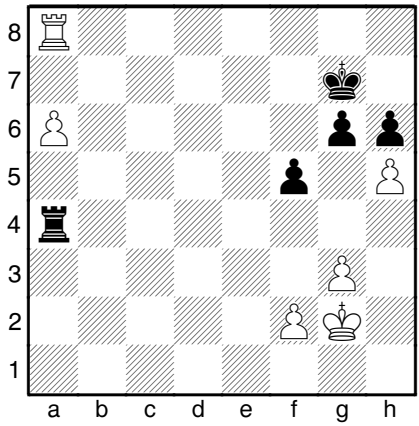
Yamamoto Tsunetomo "Hagakure: Book of the Samurai"

In order to play chess well, you need to think hard: compose a plan, find suitable candidate moves, calculate them and choose the best continuation. Is this true? Theoretically – yes.

However, in reality, things are much trickier. Pretty often, it's impossible to calculate all the consequences of your move. Sometimes there are a few approximately equal options. All in all, it's a bit naive to believe that you can always find the right move after some hard thinking.

One of my friends describes the process of playing chess as *"Sitting and pretending to think"*. This joke might be closer to real practice than it seems.

Ponfilenok – Smirnov



Black's turn

I played Black and my opponent has just moved his pawn to h5. How should Black react? Of course, he should take the pawn. That was pretty obvious to me.

However, I knew that it's possible to analyze such a position until the final result of the game is known. So I started thinking about different plans White could use and how

I could stop them. White can either bring his king to e6 or move it to support his passed pawn on the queenside. White can also keep his queenside pawn on a6 or move it to a7.

I analyzed tons of variations, found something (now I don't even remember what) and finally played… 53…g5. This is a terrible move and I lost the game afterwards.

Here's the funny thing: if I hadn't had any time for thinking, I would just have taken the pawn instantly (53…gh). This should have brought me a draw.

That was an annoying loss, but I've learnt my lesson. Later I noticed that this error is very typical of chess players.

Whenever someone thinks about a move for too long a time – usually he plays either something trivial or ridiculous.

Why does it happen? There's an interesting general idea about that.

When you think and act – its thinking.

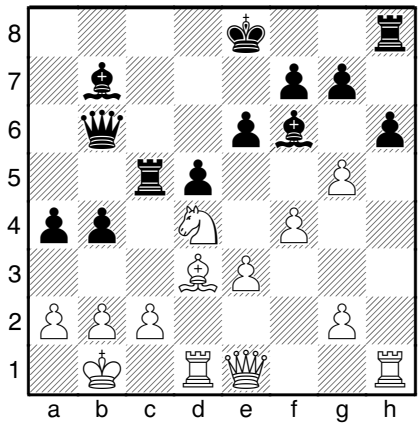
When you think and think and rethink – you are having doubts.

When you have been thinking for a certain length of time, and are not able to come to a clear conclusion, it simply means that the situation is complex. You can't calculate all the variations there. Hence, you just need to make a decision and execute it, even if you don't have a 100% guaranteed result.

If you keep thinking instead, you start "diving into doubt". The more you think, the more you "sink".

The most illustrative example of this happened in my game against Yagupov.

Smirnov – Yagupov



Black's turn

My opponent was an International Master. In this position, he thought for 20 minutes (!!) and played 22… hg.Obviously, this loses the h8-rook and on the next move Black resigned.

How can you avoid such silly mistakes?

Play reasonably fast. In most cases, you should play a move within 1-3 minutes (in a long time control game).

Thinking for more than 10 minutes over one move is usually useless. If you cannot calculate the lines in 10 minutes, you will not be able to do so after a longer thinking time anyway.

CONCLUSIONS

- If thinking takes too long, the results will be poor.
- If you suffer from time troubles – it's happening due to your indecision. That time was mostly spent on "diving into doubt".
- Play reasonably fast. Usually you should play a move within 1-5 minutes.

Chapter 11
Making the right decisions, right on time!

"Time is what we want most, but what we use worst."
William Penn

The TIME factor is really important. I regularly receive e-mails from students who are having a hard time dealing with time trouble. And if you are one of those chess players who faces this dilemma often, then you are in for a treat.

In this chapter, we'll summarize everything we've been discussing about TIME. Additionally, I will lay down some extra tips to boost your performance even further.

Very often, we see the following situation: *a player plays a good game, gets an advantage, but then appears to be in time trouble! Under time pressure, he makes an annoying mistake and even loses in the end!*

Such a situation is certainly frustrating. And the recommendations I'm about to give will help set your mind free from the chains of time trouble.

First and foremost:

There is a great difference between thinking and having doubts.

In most cases, a chess player THINKS only during the first few minutes after the opponent makes his move. After that, he starts to check the SAME variations again and again. Not content, he starts to worry about the consequences and tries to find the 100% ideal move – and the cycle goes on and on.

Guess what? **This cycle doesn't help at all!** This only creates chaos in his head and totally mixes things up. Finally, after going through the same variations, worrying about the consequences and vainly searching for the perfect move, he does something ridiculous… and you should know what happens next.

To avoid this typical, VERY frustrating and game-breaking scenario, keep these points in mind:

- **Do NOT calculate one variation two times.**

  You may not be the BEST calculator around but when you sit at the board, you only have yourself to trust.

- In most cases, **you should NOT spend more than three minutes on one move.**

  You may need to spend more time on crucial and highly tactical positions, but three minutes is the average for every move.

This also brings us to the next bit of advice:

Use your intuition.

Look, even a computer – whether it's Rybka, Houdini or anything else – CANNOT calculate all of the lines until the end and come to a 100% correct conclusion. Therefore, trying to judge the outcome of the game for MANY moves ahead is a wasted effort.

Oftentimes, you will find yourself in a situation where you have two or three logical moves and there's no way that you can calculate the lines until the end or come to a certain conclusion.

What to do?

- Use your intuition!

This means you should choose the move that came to your mind FIRST

(Which seemed good to you at first sight of a position) and then perform only the calculation needed to verify that the move is tactically sound. This is very powerful advice! Check it in your practice and you'll see that it works great!

- And another piece of advice: **make normal moves.**

Most often, a game is decided by a mistake of one player (NOT by the brilliant play of his opponent). Hence, **it's more important to avoid mistakes than to find 100% perfect moves all the time.**

Don't be too harsh on yourself. Don't try to make 100% correct moves all the time. A NORMAL move is good enough in most cases.

Even the greatest players like Karpov follow this advice! The former World Champion, when faced with a branching point in one of his games, goes for the sound, normal and generally good move… the one that requires the least amount of calculation.

He didn't win ALL of his games, BUT he won MOST of them. Heck! He was a former World Champion. You'd do great by following his footsteps.

Let me tell you a little story. Recently I got a message from a chess player, a close follower of my blog to be precise. He explained his chess problems, and one of them was constant time trouble. I recommended one of my chess courses, which contains the answers to most of his questions.

He answered: *"Yes, I've been thinking about your courses since last month, but couldn't decide which one to start with"!*

I can't but smile and laugh a bit at this. It's not surprising that he has a time trouble problem in chess, is it?

He thought about one simple decision for more than a month!!!

- So the fourth nugget of advice is: **decide and do it quickly!**

If you have time troubles in chess, then you probably have problems when it comes to making decisions in life. Procrastination is a habit you want to get rid of.

ANY decision moves you forward! If your decision was wrong, then you will know that this thing does not work. You have learnt something from it and it's going to be useful in the future. Then you will find another solution and you will always keep going forward!

On the other hand, the one who doesn't make a decision (or postpones it) will be stuck in his current place. Meanwhile, he loses the most important thing – **TIME**.

I strongly advise that you make decisions – and make them quickly! **ANY decision is better than nothing!**

Our life consists of TIME: years, months, days, minutes… Thus **loss of time shortens your life. A loss of time is a little suicide. So make decisions. And make them quickly!**

OPPONENTS

Chapter 12
Opponents: "operating instructions"

There's a lot of ego involved in a game of chess. As far as I know, chess was even prohibited in the past in some countries as gambling.

These days, lots of people are obsessed with internet blitz. If you win, you feel enthusiastic and want to increase your success. If you lose, you want to take on a rematch and redeem yourself. Either result motivates you to keep playing!

It all revolves around our EGO. Losing a game against a computer program might only be little annoying, but losing a game against another person hurts our self-respect.

By the way, there's no way to get out of this "ego trap". There will always be some people better than you. Well, of course, there are a few world champions, but even for them it's hard to stay at the top for a long time.

This "ego trap" leads to nervousness, fear of a strong opponent, etc. Different players try various approaches to handle this.

Gligoric tried to avoid thinking about his opponent at all and just *"played against pieces"*.

Another famous GM threw darts into a picture of his upcoming opponent, developing strong anger against him.

Probably, you don't want to adopt the latter approach. So let's find a better alternative.

Let's take a closer look at your opponents.

Why do you play against them and not just study chess books/videos?

Well, a real game is more exciting, that's true. But, most importantly, a game gives you a unique opportunity to test your skills. You can implement those ideas you've learnt from chess lessons. You will clearly see what works well for you. You'll discover your mistakes and will be able to fix them during your future training.

You really NEED your opponents. Top chess players (as well as other professional sportsmen) pay money to their sparring partners.

There's no way to train and improve your skills without applying them.

Your opponents are in fact your training assistants, who help you to progress. The stronger your assistant / opponent is, the better is the training you'll get.

You probably would not want to play against a complete beginner. Although you'll certainly win, that game would be meaningless to you. On the contrary, if you get a chance to play against a stronger rival, you'll benefit in two main ways:

1. You'll discover your mistakes and will be able to fix them, becoming a better player.

2. You'll be able to see and adopt for yourself some advanced techniques used by your opponent.

After all, it's not about beating your opponent; he's another person and you probably don't care about him/her anyway. This is all about YOU.

- You need to apply and train your skills.
- You can't do this alone: you need someone to help you. Your "sparring partner" is your assistant.

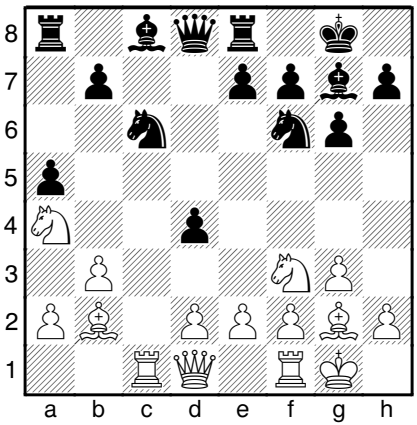
An elevator helps you go to the top. It would be strange to feel anger or fear of an elevator, right? It only helps you to reach your goal. Your chess opponents help you to do the same thing!

CONCLUSIONS:

- Your opponents are your training assistants, who help you to progress.
- The stronger your assistant is, the better the training you'll get.

Chapter 13
Your opponent's view

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.
Sun Tzu, "The Art of War".



White's turn

Imagine you are playing this position as White and it's your turn.

Which move would you play?

White can play something simple like 12.e3 and your position is definitely alright.

As an alternative, there's an interesting but somewhat risky idea to sacrifice the exchange by playing 12.Rc6. After 12...bc 13.Nd4, White gets the initiative in this position. On the other hand, this variation is not very clear.

If you missed something in the calculation, you might end up with material disadvantage and lose. That's why players usually reject such risky options if they can't calculate the consequences clearly.

It all looks logical so far, does it not? Well, almost. We somewhat forgot about our opponent.

If a certain position is complex for you, it's probably just as complex for your opponent as well.

Let's say you played the risky move 12.Rc6. You may feel unsure whether it's going to end up well for you.

However, imagine your opponent's situation.

He probably did not expect your move (or at least underestimated it, did not think you would real-

ly play it). Hence, he faces an unpleasant surprise.

It shakes his self-confidence; because he starts thinking that he might overlook something. The move 12.Rc6 changes the position significantly, and therefore it breaks the plans the Black player might intend to pursue.

After all, it's harder to defend than to attack. Fear takes molehills for mountains. There's a good chance that Black will be frustrated, will lose confidence in his position and will not find the best moves.

To conclude this idea: the 12.Rc6 move creates an uncomfortable position for White, but it's much more uncomfortable for Black. So White should definitely go for it!

You normally think about a situation from your own perspective. However, in this way you forget about the other party. This may cost you lots of great opportunities.

Let me repeat the key idea:

If something is complex for you, it's probably complex for your opponent as well.

At the same time, if you adopt the habit of going into "uncomfortable situations", after a little practice you'll get used to it. Your opponent, on the contrary, does not have this skill and will be totally frustrated.

Strong players use this psychological weapon all the time. Lots of Tal's sacrifices could have been refuted with proper play. But who cares? He won those games anyway.

You may check the games of other top players like Nakamura, Morozevich, Jobava, Polgar, Sargissian and many others. They regularly mix up the position, confuse their opponent and obtain a victory.

If you want to master this style of playing, you may study my course "How to Beat Titled Players": http://chess-teacher.com/product/how-to-beat-titled-players/.

If something is complex for you, it's probably complex for your opponent as well. For example:

- If you can sacrifice a piece/pawn but are unsure if it works, there's a great chance that your opponent will not find a refutation for it.
- If you can exchange pieces or keep the tension going, the "natural reaction" is to exchange. However, you

should do the opposite. You may study my free lesson "The most common mistake": http://chess-teacher.com/the-most-common-mistake/.

By the way, the same general principle works in all other spheres of life.

EXAMPLE #1

Dale Carnegiebecame a world class specialist in human relations. He held seminars, wrote books, etc. Although he suggested a lot of recommendations, they all revolve around one idea: to look at the situation from the perspective of your interlocutor.

For instance, it's natural for us to talk about OUR news, ideas, etc. However, it might be irrelevant and therefore uninteresting to other people.

Instead, you can talk about the topics of interest to your INTERLOCUTOR. Then your success is guaranteed.

EXAMPLE #2

Henry Ford spoke about the necessity to switch focus for businessmen. An entrepreneur normally cares about his profit and most new ventures don't succeed. Instead, if you truly put your customers and their needs into your focus – huge profits will come naturally to you.

EXAMPLE #3

There might be some sort of work you find uncomfortable. Normally you would reject it. However, take into account that **most other people have probably thought in the same way.** So if you change your mind and accept the challenge – you can be ahead of the crowd!

Lots of people find giving public speeches uncomfortable. You might be surprised, but some psychological research has proved that people are afraid of public speaking more than death!

Taking this into account, you can invest some time in developing this skill. The same as with anything else, public performance is a skill that you need to learn and practice. After that, you'll get a massive advantage over at least 90% of people.

Here's another example: most people don't even think about really big projects. You've probably heard of the *"Go big or go home"* proverb, but do you know many people who really follow it?

If most other people are afraid of starting BIG endeavors, it means they can't become your competitors. Hence, YOU can do it.

"I like thinking big. If you're going to be thinking anything, you might as well think big" – said US billionaire ***Donald Trump.***

CONCLUSIONS:

- Look at the situation from the perspective of the other party as well. Most people have heard this idea but do not put it into practice. If you do so, you'll be ahead of the crowd!

- In chess, if something is uncomfortable for you, it's uncomfortable for your opponent as well. Go into such positions! You'll soon develop the necessary skills, while your opponents will crack under pressure.

Chapter 14
Beating weaker opponents

Murphy's First Law:
Nothing is as easy as it looks.
Murphy's Third Law:
Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

Winning a game against a weaker opponent should be easy, shouldn't it? However, in reality, it often does not go that way. Almost every tournament has a couple of "sensations", when a well-known player draws/loses a game against an amateur-level player.

For instance, in the World Championship of 2001, Viswanathan Anand lost his first game to Olivier Touzane, even though Anand's rating was 400+ points higher! Again, such sudden results are not exceptional.
Why does this happen?

When you play against a weak opponent, you expect yourself to win. Inherently, you hope to win easily, without too much effort on your part. You would prefer not to risk, but to win slowly but surely.

You start playing "normal" moves (as opposed to the best and the most vigorous moves). You think that it'll be enough for a win (because your opponent is weaker) and you'll avoid unnecessary risk and complications.

For example, if you face a complex position, where you need to calculate a lot of variations, you might decide to play a simpler move, hoping that you can win the game anyway.

Such mediocre solutions can ultimately lead you to mediocre results… I've just described a very common scenario between two players who have quite a significant gap between their ratings.

A draw or a loss against a weaker opponent is especially annoying! Let's analyze this situation and get rid of it once and for all!

Imagine you are playing against a person whose rating is 200 points lower than yours. Let's say your rating is 2200, while your opponent's is 2000.

Does this mean that you are much stronger and should definitely win

this game? Well, it's not that easy, as there are a couple of other factors we need to consider.

Firstly, your rating is RELATIVE.

Your rating shows your BEST performance. For example, **what does it mean to have a rating of 2200?** It shows that performing at 2200 is your BEST performance, your PEAK performance (otherwise your rating would be higher).

However, in a particular game you might play worse than usual.

If I play blitz games in the late evening, when I'm tired, I usually play much worse compared to my normal condition. I can reduce my rating for 100-200 rating points in such a "late blitz session". This means that when I'm tired, my ACTUAL rating is 100-200 points lower than it usually is.

Through this example, I want to illustrate that your rating is not something "fixed in stone". It's a relative, changeable indicator of your chess strength.

There's a teasing proverb amongst professional players:

"Marriage will cost you -100 rating points".

Of course, your knowledge will remain the same, but it can be hard to focus on chess.

All in all, your rating shows your best power. Sometimes, however, you may be using less than your full potential.

Now let's come back to our example. If you, a 2200-rated player, play against a 2000 player – it does NOT mean that you are stronger "by default". I

f you start playing those "normal" moves, you'll be using let's say 90% of your full power. 90% of 2200 is 1980, which is close to the power of your "weak" 2000 opponent.

That explains why, after some play, you'll appear in an equal (drawish) position. Then you start getting worried – you expected to win this game! Now you'll face an unpleasant choice: to accept a draw or to bite the bullet and do something risky.

The second choice can lead to an annoying loss, yet another typical scenario in David v Goliath matchups like this!

Let's sum-up the key things with regard to playing against a weaker opponent. Don't fall into a psychological illusion of your superiority "by default" (because of your high-

er rating). While it's natural for a player to relax while facing weaker rivals, now you know that it's completely wrong to do so. If you don't perform to your best, your actual rating for this particular game decreases and you are not stronger anymore.

Hence, you should perform at your BEST and use your FULL potential.

You've got to take risks and play the most vigorous moves, even against a relatively weak opponent.

Now let's talk about your opponent. His rating is also relative. He might play some positions or openings better than others.

It's very typical* for beginner/intermediate-level players to play well when they have a direct attack against your king. In such a position, a 2000-rated player can play on a 2200 level.

**Of course, it is not applicable to ALL players, although it's true for most of them.*

However, they usually lack skills in strategic positions or endgames. In this sort of position, the same 2000-rated player can play on an 1800 level.

What does this mean for you?

While playing against a weaker opponent, you should avoid his strong sideand make use of his weaknesses. More specifically, your main goal is:

NOT to let him have a direct attack against you.

This can be done in two main ways.

WAY #1: Attack yourself. This is a very good way, actually. The art of defense is a very hard thing to perfect. Most beginner/intermediate players don't possess it. This means that your attack will most likely be successful. Moreover, even if your attack is objectively not completely correct, there's a high chance that your opponent will not find a way to repulse it.

Therefore, you may play more boldly than usually. Start an attack roughly. It will confuse your weak opponent and bring him down quickly.

WAY #2: Play "positionally". Chess is inherently a strategic game. If your rating is higher, it normally means that your understanding of the game is better. Use it.

You can create a closed position (with pawn chains in the center).

Alternatively, you can go into an endgame. Don't worry if the position is equal – your opponent will find a way to make it worse for himself.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. If your rating is higher, it does not mean that you are stronger "by default". You should do your very best and use 100% of your power to be superior in this battle.

2. While playing against a weaker opponent, your main goal is NOT to let him have a direct attack against you. You can:

    - Attack yourself (do it boldly!)

    - Play positionally.

Following these two simple rules will leave no chances for your weaker opponents!

Chapter 15
Beating stronger opponents

In order to attain the impossible, one must attempt the absurd.
Miguel de Cervantes

In the previous lesson, we analyzed the correct attitude and mental approach when facing WEAKER opponents. Now let's talk about the flip side of the coin: **the right mental approach when facing a STRONGER opponent.**

Just like in the previous scenario, there are some typical mistakes (which most players make), and I have some important **practical recommendations** and antidotes for these mistakes. Without further ado, let's go!

Let's say your opponent is about 200 rating points ahead of you. You know that this guy is strong and can find powerful ideas and combinations. You've seen him crush a player on the same rating range as you!

To make sure that you don't suffer the same fate, **you try playing carefully.** Also, you have an underlying idea in your head that a draw is a good result for you.

Although it makes sense, in reality these ideas rather constrain you. This mental approach sometimes makes you play too carefully. No, that's an understatement – this mental approach makes you play PASSIVELY.

When you play passive moves, you don't create any problems for your opponent. This simplifies the task of your stronger opponent even more.

Let's develop a more effective approach. First, we should unravel your opponent's mindset for a game. Let's look at your battle from his angle.

- A stronger opponent wants to win, while losing would be a complete disaster for him. Therefore, a stronger player would prefer to have a risk-free position, where he can press

for a win over a long time span.

- A higher-level player usually has better positional understanding.
- Being more professional, an expert opponent normally has better home preparation (opening knowledge).

You see? If you play "carefully", avoiding risky/complex variations – you give your opponent exactly what he wants! You let him call the shots and make his task easier.

What should you do? Avoid the strong sides of your opponent's game and use his psychological weaknesses.

How to play against a stronger opponent?

1. Avoid his opening preparation

Well, certainly it's easier to say than do. Nevertheless, take into account that playing your standard opening line may be a bad idea. You will both be preparing it, but your opponent's preparation may be better.

2. Attack your opponent, play "tactically"

One grandmaster was saying that "Against a club player, Black wins with 1.e4-e5". He meant to say that 1…e5 creates strategic types of positions, where a club player will not be able to use any tactical tricks, while a GM will be able to exploit his superior positional understanding. You need to avoid this type of situation.

This brings us to the next idea:

3. Mix things up, play risky moves

Remember, your opponent would hate to lose! He would prefer to win slowly, but surely.

Take risks, whip up attacks, throw him offbalance with sacrifices and accept his sacrifices, and give him a hard time proving his point. Of course, it can fail, but this will give you counter-chances… counter-chances you will never have when you bow down and let him take the driver's seat when you play passively.

When you mix things up, go into complicated variations, etc. – your opponent starts feeling uncomfortable. He does not fully control the situation anymore. He starts having doubts like

"Should I accept the challenge and go into the line where there's some risk of losing? Or should I play a timid move, trying to keep things under control?"

In either case, you can take your chance!

By the way, this general principle works in other spheres of life.

***Mark Zuckerberg**, CEO of Facebook, says:*

"The riskiest thing is to take no risks".

Lots of modern businesses strive to follow this guideline.

There's no guarantee that risky play will bring you a win. But passive play will bring a loss for sure.

Now you can see that "playing for a draw" against a stronger opponent is a huge mistake!

Another common error is to play "carefully".

A stronger (more experienced) player usually has better understanding and technique. In a calm position, he will outplay you, slowly but surely. And since you are not posing any problems, there are no risks involved when he pushes hard for a win, and that's EXACTLY what he wants!

After all, when you face a stronger opponent, a "normal" result is your loss. Therefore, if you don't want to get an expected result, you should do something different, something unexpected.

Play riskily and take your chances. You can't win against stronger opponents all the time, but in a particular game you can beat anyone!

CONCLUSIONS:

Don't fall into the trap of "careful moves" and "playing for a draw" against a stronger opponent. This rather favors you losing.

<u>How to play against a stronger opponent:</u>

- Avoid his opening preparation.
- Attack your opponent, play "tactically".
- Mix things up, play risky moves.

Chapter 16
Impolite advice

A man generally has two reasons for doing a thing.
One that sounds good, and a real one.
J. P. Morgan

Here's the promised impolite advice: see a jerk in your opponent!

True, it does not seem nice or polite. However, my goal is to tell you real-life advice, not just a bunch of common stuff.

You might be surprised, but the title of this chapter is a quote from a world champion! Well, of course, he shared it with his friends only, not with the entire public.

Here's the bottom line. If you want to win, you need to exploit your opponent's mistakes. In order to NOTICE his errors, you should set your mind to this.

The easiest way to do so is to keep in mind that your opponent is a jerk, a worthless player. Then you'll expect his mistakes and will notice them immediately.

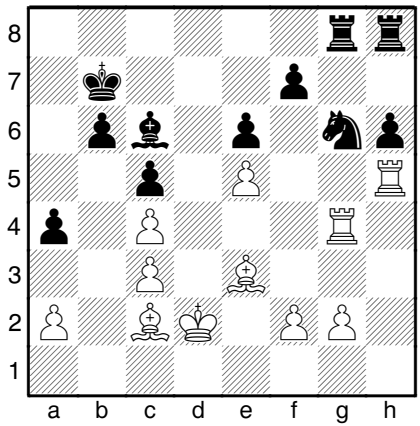
But what if your opponent is a titled player?

What if he is a few hundred rating points ahead of you?

It does not change anything. Look at the analysis of the games between the world's top players. All of them make mistakes, sometimes silly mistakes, many times during one game!

15 November 2014 was the 6th game of the World Championship match between Carlsen and Anand.

Carlsen - Anand



Black's turn

With his last move 26.Kd2, Carlsen blundered, leaving the pretty simple tactic of 26…Ne5, which wins the game for Black. I'm sure most amateur players would be able to find this easy combination.

What did Anand do?

He did not find this idea, played 26…a4 instead and lost the game afterwards.

The best two players in the world missed an easy win for Black. Again, this is not an exceptional case, as you will find blunders in ANY super tournament.

Why does this happen?

Simply because we are all human and no one is perfect.

Every chess player has some weaknesses.

Every player makes mistakes, usually a couple of them during a game.

Every chess player loses games regularly. ANYONE can lose a game. **This game can be against you!**
"See a jerk in your opponent"!

It will help you to notice and exploit the opponent's mistakes. You'll find a lot of counterblows and unpleasant surprises for your opponent.

P.S. There's a funny thing. Being self-confident is considered a positive quality. *"Seeing a jerk in your opponent"* may sound bad. But, in fact, these are the two sides of the same coin.

YOUR GOALS

Chapter 17
Worship of the milestones

There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.
Oscar Wilde

Have you ever traveled to another town by bus or car? If so, you should have seen the milestones.

How would you react, if you were to see a man worship a certain milestone? You would probably think he/she had gone crazy and maybe would call an emergency service.

However, imagine that you decided to talk to this insane man first. In reply to your amazed question, the person answers that he has reached the milestone of 100 miles. Now he's proud of himself and he's celebrating this event.

There is definitely something strange about this person, isn't there?

A milestone is only a road sign that helps a traveler stay on the right path. There's nothing so special about it.

Now let's move on to a more common situation. For instance, there's a man who wants to earn lots of money, let's say one million dollars.

He thinks about this goal, makes efforts to achieve it. One day this might become a reality. Then the person would probably take pride in himself and would celebrate this special event hugely.

Everything looks pretty natural here. However, let's look at this situation from another perspective. Most likely, the man did not earn these million bucks in one day. Probably his capital has been rising gradually; it reached 50,000, then 100K, 500K, 900K and, one day, it became one million.

If this person keeps doing his job, there's a huge chance his capital will keep raising.

Then what is so special about his goal of "one million dollars"?

It's nothing more than a benchmark, "a milestone".

These days, it's common to set goals and to try your best to achieve them. If this happens, we call it "success". However, we become so obsessed with this "game of goals" that we forget its meaning.

"Goals" are the milestones that help you stay on the right path.

That's it. So take it easy!

Talking about chess players, there are many of them who *"want to reach a 2300 rating"* or *"want to become an IM in 3 years"* or something like that.

I guess it was **GM Morozevich** who said: "*Chess players became so obsessed with their rating, that soon we'll start writing a player's rating on his forehead, and we'll call him by this 'new name' "*.

Your chess rating is changing all the time. It only reflects how well you have played in the last few tournaments.

You can improve your rating significantly in just 1-2 tournaments; it's only a matter of your good play. This drives us back to the key point: your only goal is to play good moves. Your rating is only "a milestone" that helps you track your progress.

We've gone a little crazy with all those "goals". It's time to take a deep breath and relax.

Don't get me wrong: it's fine to set goals and strive to achieve them.

However, don't forget the ESSENCE of this process. Your only goal is to do your best, to maintain the high quality of your games, in simple words – "to play good moves". That's the only realistic goal.

All the other "goals" you set for yourself are only milestones on the everlasting way of your progress. They are indicators that help you stay on the right path and evaluate your advancement.

There's a common problem for almost everyone. When the stakes are high, when there's a chance to get a trophy – people can't bear this psychological pressure, start making mistakes and spoil the opportunity.

That's why so many times chess players experience annoying losses in critical games, which could have brought them a prize, IM/GM title, etc.

How to handle this situation? Very simple: just recollects a man wor-

shipping a milestone. You don't want to be that man, right?

Instead, you may recollect the world's top players. They know that their goal is "to play good moves". So they are relaxed. They keep in mind a simple fact: there will be a lot of games and tournaments ahead in the future. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

One of the classical Chinese books about the art of war, **"Wuzi"**, states: "*Those who don't care about their life will save it. Those who care –will lose it"*.

If you are too concerned about something, this extra psychological pressure you put on yourself will make it harder for you to act properly.

If you are relaxed and don't get nervous about the goal, you will be more likely to achieve it. If you take it easy – it's easy for you to take it.

CONCLUSIONS

- It's useful to set goals for yourself and strive to achieve them.
- Goals are only the milestones on the everlasting way of your progress.
- If you take it easy – it's easy for you to take it.
- And, finally, don't worship the milestones!

Chapter 18
What's your real goal?

If you want to make God laugh,
tell him about your plans.
Woody Allen

Let me start another chapter with a bit of a wild story.

Imagine that you meet your old friend who looks deeply concerned. You ask him:

"What's the matter"?

He answers: *"At anytime a large meteorite can come from outer space, and it will destroy the Earth"*!

What would you think about this man?

Probably you'll think he's little bit "out there".

Modern scientists have a pretty solid knowledge about outer space. They don't predict any trouble for our planet for millions of years ahead. Nevertheless, outer space remains a mystery and no one can be 100% sure about its future.

So, should you really worry about a potential meteorite? Of course not, it's insane! Unless you are Bruce Willis,* you can make no impact on it anyway.

Our task is pretty clear: to do what we can. There are lots of things beyond our control and it makes no sense for us to worry about them.

Everything might seem completely obvious to you by now. Let me ask you another simple question, though:

"Right then, why do you worry about the results of your chess games"?

You don't control the result. No matter how hard you try, you can't guarantee any result. It simply does not depend on you solely.

There are many other factors that you don't control, although they may still influence your win/loss:

- Your opponent.
- Your or your opponent's pregame preparation.

- Your or your opponent's coach (who could give good/bad advice).

- Your physical condition (which might be influenced by your breakfast, disease, a magnetic storm and who knows what else…).

Even ancient Roman warriors knew a proverb: *"A horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord".*

This is a very wise approach! No matter how well you have prepared for a battle, there's no guarantee that you will win. It is beyond the scope of your control.

What can you do?

Very simple: the only thing you can and should do is to do your job as well as you can. That's it.

If you listen to an interview with almost any of the world's top chess players, you'll see how they state their only goal for a game: "Play good moves". It may sound too simplistic, but it's the ONLY realistic goal you may have.

This simple approach to a game has lots of advantages:

- You keep focused on the most important thing (the quality of your play).

- You don't bother yourself with any other thoughts that don't have any real value/impact anyway.

- You stay cool and look at your opponent (who is trying so hard that smoke will soon start coming out of his ears) with a condescending smile.

CONCLUSIONS:

- If you don't want to find yourself in a lunatic asylum one day – don't worry about the things that you don't control anyway.

- Your ONLY real goal for a chess game is to "play good moves".

Chapter 19
Unshakable confidence

If one thinks only of winning, a sordid victory will be worse than a defeat. For the most part, it becomes a squalid defeat.
Hagakure, The Book of the Samurai.

One of the most common questions I've received from students while writing this book is:

"How to handle a loss"?

Another one is:

"How to demonstrate top performance being under pressure of result/rating/prize"?

Well, I can tell you to "stay calm, don't worry", but you know that yourself already and it does not help. Even if you don't want to be nervous, it does not mean you will not.

It's not that easy to control our emotions. You may try some tricks, but they usually produce only a superficial, temporary effect. There are **underlying reasons for your emotions** – these are your deep beliefs. It's impossible to change anything on the surface without shaking (or rather improving) this foundation. This is exactly what we'll be doing throughout this chapter.

Let's start with this question: **can a loss be better than a draw?**

- What do you think?
- Does it sound like nonsense to you?

Let's imagine a typical practical situation. You are playing a tournament. It's the last round. If you win – you'll get 1st place. A draw can bring you something like 5th place, while a loss will leave you out of the prizes altogether.

What result would you aim for in this case?

You could try to avoid risk and offer a draw (or play for a draw). This is a possible way: many players choose it actually.

Now let's put it another way.

- How would GM Garry Kasparov act in a similar tournament situation?
- Would he strive for a draw?

Of course not! He would definitely go for a big fight, striving for a victory.

If you wish to become a CHAMPION one day – you have to adopt this approach. There's simply no other way.

Playing for a draw in such a situation would prove your lack of self-confidence, fear of your opponent, lack of passion in pursuing your goals, and ultimately – absence of a champion psychology. This demonstrates those negative qualities to everyone, but mainly toyourself. Your subconscious mindwill remember this approach, this loser psychology.

Do you really want it?

You may argue: *"Alright, Igor, I will take risks and play for a win. But what if I end up losing"*?

Even if that happens, you'll keep your integrity, your champion psychology. You'll go out of the tournament hall with your head held high, saying to yourself: *"Ok, I'll get it next time"*. And, you know what, if you keep following this approach, in one of the next tournaments you'll be on the top for sure.

Even from the pragmatic standpoint, winning one "jackpot" – the 1st prize – will give you more money compared to the small amounts you could collect in several tournaments getting something like 5th place.

To conclude this: a fighting loss is better than a cowardly draw.

By the way, let's not forget about other scenarios: a fighting win is better than a cowardly draw as well

Now I have another question for you. **Can you suffer from lack of losses?**

You know, there must be a catch in it, right? Please, think about it yourself first. Then we'll discuss it together.

If you don't lose regularly, it means that the majority of your opponents are weaker than you. If you are the world champion – that's ok. Otherwise, it means that you are avoiding playing against tough rivals.

It also means that you are neglecting your progress. Weaker opponents don't make you improve – you don't need them, you can win anyway.

While facing stronger opponents, you are going to suffer, that's true. At the same time, you'll be adapt-

ing yourself to that higher level and one day you'll fit perfectly. That's the day that will bring you a higher title or a champion trophy.

Hence, you will be suffering from lack of losses for sure. Easy wins against weaker opponents can please your ego. But ego is nothing – it's a mirage; while, in reality, you will be suffering from a lack of progress.

No matter whether you want it or not, **you will be adapting yourself to the level of your opponent.** Play against weaker opponents if you want to be like them. Play against greater opponents if you want to be like them. It's that simple and it's your choice.

Can a win be bad?

You might be surprised, but as a coach, I've seen exactly this happen so many times!

A student is playing a rather bad game. However, in the end, he manages to win thanks to the blunders of his opponent. Usually, people are really happy in such cases. They are happy to be lucky and to dupe an opponent.

As a coach, I feel sorry for this "winner". His ego doesn't let him see that this victoryis rather undeserved. He will not take his mistakes seriously enough, and therefore will keep moving in the wrong direction. Future losses are inevitable.

Indeed, it would be better for the student to lose this game and to learn this lesson!

Can losing be great?

If you think I'm trying to make you into a masochist, it's not the case. We'll come to the actual conclusion soon, but now we are still on the way. So, can losing be great?

Imagine you are given a chance to play against a world champion. Would you decline this offer? I bet not. Even if you lose the game, you will:

- ✓ Get the greatest experience you can possibly have;
- ✓ Move yourself closer to that top level;
- ✓ Get extra publicity;
- ✓ Just have fun being part of this exciting event.

So, even a loss will be overly compensated for in many different ways. And it will certainly help a lot in your future chess progress.

Why are we discussing all these

examples? Because when you are too concerned about something, it hampers you getting it.

If all you think about is winning, or getting a score, you will always be very nervous. Too narrow a view on results, typical for most players out there, brings them extra psychological pressure. It prevents those people from performing to their best and from having fun while playing.

Let me repeat a quote from an epigraph:

"If one thinks only of winning, a sordid victory will be worse than a defeat. For the most part, it becomes a squalid defeat."

By the way, if you are too concerned about winning, you will inevitably be too concerned about losing as well. The only way to escape from that trap is to develop a broader view on results. That's what we've been doing in this chapter.

You need to have more profound goals than just getting a score in a table of results. There are other things that are more important than the result of a particular game:

➔ Your overall chess progress.

➔ Cultivating your champion psychology.

➔ Your general purpose in playing chess.

This broader view of results is an approach of a wise man. It forms unshakable confidencewithin you.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. You can't control your emotions without addressing the underlying reasonsfor them.

2. Develop a broader view of results. A single game does not matter that much. There are other things that are much more important:

   ➔ Your overall chess progress.

   ➔ Cultivating your champion psychology.

   ➔ Your general purpose in playing chess.

Chapter 20
Training goals

Achieving a goal is a hard challenge.
It's especially hard when there's no goal…

Most chess players set goals like *"To reach a 2300 rating (or any other number) this year"*. As you already know, this is not a real goal but rather a milestone to track your progress.

We've discussed the point that you should be focusing on the quality of your games ("playing good moves"). With that being said, you should set **chess goals** for yourself.

What is "a chess goal"?

Imagine you are going to play in a tournament, or even only a couple of blitz games. If you just play, it does not bring much to you.You keep using the skills you already have.

That's why there are lots of players who have played thousands of blitz games online, although this seemingly large experience has not given them anything.

Instead, you can set some chess goals for yourself. For instance, you can decide to train with the anti-blunder technique* in these games. While playing, you will pay attention to this aspect of the game and keep following this new method. In this case, the game will help you to train and acquire a new skill.

What other chess goals may you set for yourself? Well, it can be anything that is important for you. You may practice:

- New opening variations
- Rational time spending
- New plans
- Calculation skills
- And the list goes on…

This advice has both psychological and chess value. From the standpoint of chess, you are developing new skills, which is great.

From the psychological point of view, you will know that you are getting a certain positive experience, no matter whether you win or lose. And this is not just a nice phrase!

You'll know exactly what you have trained for and exactly what useful experience you have acquired.

You've probably heard an anecdote about a sign on the director's door:

"1. The boss is always right. 2. If the boss is wrong, see item 1".

Rephrasing this joke, I can state:

1. Chess goals are always right.

2. If some other goals are more important, see item 1!

CONCLUSIONS:

- Before playing chess, set "chess goals" for yourself.

- Reaching chess goals will lead to everything else (rating, titles, prizes, etc.) automatically.

Chapter 21
What obstructs 95% of players?

It's all to do with the training:
you can do a lot if you're properly trained.
Queen Elizabeth II

There are literally millions of chess books and tutorials available to us these days and all chess learners study from this same pool of materials.

However, only a very small group of players (less than 5%) will experience any significant progress.

The majority of players (95%) will unfortunately experience only slight advancement or, worse, no progress at all.

How to deal with such a sad situation?

There are two typical approaches:

1) The first group of players is a little confused and they ask themselves the question (or send the question to me)

–"Why am I not progressing despite all my desire and efforts?"

If you are in this group, please accept my congratulations – you have a very good chance of improvement!

2) The second group of players **prefers to believe in what they want to believe.** They think that they are "*experienced,*" "*advanced,*" "*experts*" or that they "*know all the chess basics already,*" etc.

However, there is a well-known refutation proverb,

"If you are so smart, then why are you so poor?" In regard to chess, this proverb basically translates to:

"If you know so many things about chess, then how come your rating is so low?"

In reply to this obvious question, this second group of players will start providing various lame excuses, such as:

" I'm a good player, but only have problems with tactics (or opening repertoire or anything else)."

"I don't want (or don't have time) to memorize opening lines."

"I have problems with concentration and sometimes make blunders."

Being under the delusion of their "*advanced*" level, such people produce a lot of weak excuses for their poor practical results.

They also start blaming chess books, authors, teachers, etc. OK, maybe a certain book was bad, but it's quite unlikely that *all* of them are bad, right?

So maybe that's not where the problem lies?

All in all, if you are a 2000-rated player and honestly believe that you've learned all of the main strategic and tactical motifs – then you are in this second group.

In this case, I wish you good luck, because there's nothing else I can help you with.

Yes, I'm not here to say pleasant things but to tell you the **REAL** situation.

Now let's get back to the first group of people, who wonder,

"Why am I not progressing despite all my desire and efforts?"

I'll tell you something seemingly obvious; yet it will have a tremendous effect on you!

There is a HUGE (I mean ENORMOUS) difference between reading and studying. Unfortunately,most players don't fully understand this, so let me explain this difference in detail.

1. Time:

How much time do you spend **reading** a book? Anywhere from a few days to as much as several weeks. Thus reading can be quick.

Studying a textbook can take a month or a lifetime! I'm not exaggerating. For instance, studying a religious book can take a lifetime, and even then you may still not fully understand it.

This is closely connected with the next item.

2. Repetition:

Once you have *read* a book, you never read it again. It seems boring and unnecessary.

When you *study* certain material, you try to implement its key ideas

in your practice. In this case, you'll need to repeat the process several times to make sure that you understand completely how to proceed.

Once you've applied this knowledge in a practical situation, you will develop new questions. You will then need to study this material *again* to find solutions to your new questions.

This process may recur many times until you finally get a 100% effect out of this knowledge (book).

3. Your activeness:

When you read a book or watch a video, the author of this material is active. He has prepared some materials and is providing them to you. You go over this material without really doing anything active. This is **passive learning**, much the same as when you watch a new Hollywood movie – you are a passive viewer.

When you *study* something, you are **independently active**. You try and develop solutions yourself; and only after that will you compare your ideas with those of the author.

You try to *understand* every idea put forward by the author. If you don't understand something – you don't skip it, but study the material over and over again until insight comes to you.

You try to understand and remember everything. After that, you go and try to put it into practice. You may fail, but you keep trying until you apply this new skill sufficiently to get good results.

To study requires one to be very active.

4. Level of difficulty:

As you may have guessed, *reading/watching* is easy. That's why most people like it so much!

You *read* something, you feel like you should be getting smarter. You digest ready-made material with little or no effort required by you. This comfortable situation makes you feel good because it is not difficult.

Studying is much harder. Here **you have to face your weaknesses, admit them and then put in some hard graftwhile confronting them**. You need to spend a lot of *time* and *effort*, do unusual things and *develop new habits*. Inwardly, you have to admit that somebody is smarter than you in this area,

which is painful for a lot of people.

Reading is entertainment. Studying is hard work.

5. Memorizing:

A few months after you *read* something, you only remember the most general ideas from that material.

Let's have a little test.

- Have you *studied* any of my paid courses?
- What rules were presented in the video lessons?
- What were the practical tasks?

Unfortunately, most people can only give very general answers. This means that they have **NOT-***studied* these lessons.

When you study something seriously, you won't forget it later because it is learned. It becomes part of your nature, a new habit.

In many countries, people shake hands after a meeting. You never forget to do this. You don't need to write it in your notebook – it is automatic and becomes a habit.

Studying develops new habits. Reading develops… nothing.

6. Free/paid:

Not always, but often, you can get reading material for free. More often than not, you have to pay for your study course materials.

There is some good news for you here. I've been an active chess coach for the past 10 years. During this period, I've charged $0 (in other words helped for free) and as much as $150 per hour. I've noticed an interesting thing: the more the student pays the better results he/she gets.

I always try to do my best, so my coaching is the same, but the students' **ATTITUDE** is very different.

For instance, **those who pay a lot never come late to the lesson**. Free students sometimes even skip the lessons.

Those who make serious investments write down all important information. Some of them even use a voice recorder, so as to repeat the lesson later on. Those who pay little never do so.

After an expensive lesson, a student always performs his home tasks (even when it seems unnecessary for him).

In the same way, you will probably eat a meal if you have paid a lot for it in a restaurant (even if the dish looks unusual to you). It seems silly to pay for something and then not use it.

After a free lesson, a student decides by himself which tasks to perform and how. So he distorts the training and doesn't get any real results.

All in all, when you pay for something, you take it much more seriously.

That's why some guys download tons of free chess material from the internet, but their real progress is miserable.

7. Effectiveness:

After you **study** something new, you can take a qualitative leap forward. You develop new (more effective) skills. **You change (improve) your way of playing. You start getting unusually good results**.

After **reading**something, you feel good. You may be enthusiastic. But when it comes to practice – **nothing changes. You still get the same results as before**. This upsets you. You want to improve your mood again and… you start *reading* another exciting book…

CONCLUSIONS:

- There are A LOT of chess tutorials. However, only a very small group of players experience any significant progress from them.
- Now that we have discussed this topic in great detail, it's time for you to ask yourself, "Am I reading or studying chess materials?" Be honest with yourself.
- Implement the tips from this chapter to enhance the effectiveness of your training and make your results sky rocket.

Chapter 21
How to ACTUALLY achieve your goals?

My goal for 2014
is to accomplish the goals of 2013,
which I should have done in 2012,
because I promised them in 2011
and planned them in 2010.

People love to set GOALS for themselves. It's inspirational, it's the 'right' thing to do, it helps you stay on track, etc. For instance, at New Year time, lots of people set goals for the next year.

Once the goals are established, we are normally enthusiastic to work on them and to achieve them. However, please recollect the goals you set for yourself around a year ago.

Have you accomplished them all?

For the vast majority of people, the answer is *"No"*.

Why does this happen? In this chapter, we'll discuss it. You'll learn **how to actually achieve your chess goals.** As usual, these recommendations can also be applied to anything else aside from chess.

Chess players usually set goals of two kinds:

- *"To achieve a certain rating level (2200, 2400 or anything else)".*
- *"To obtain a title (FIDE Master, International Master, etc.)".*

These two goals are pretty similar. Obtaining a new title requires the achievement of a certain rating level anyway.

Most chess players set this sort of goal for themselves and most can't achieve it. So, what do they do wrongly, and how can you actually achieve your goals?

A goal is a very general and partly emotional thing. **It requires a solid, specific, well-thought plan to achieve it.** This plan should be realistic, based on facts, not "hopes". This is a fatal flaw for the majority of chess players. The following hints will help you rectify it.

1. **Plan your tournaments**

Let's say you have 2200 rating and your goal for this year is to achieve an International Master level of 2400.

It's hard to gain more than 10-20 rating points per tournament. Hence, in order to gain 200 rating points, you need to play 10-20 tournaments. Let's take an average of 15 tournaments per year.It means you should play one tourney per month over nine months and two tourneys per month over three months.

Are you comfortable with this schedule? If yes, it's time to start signing yourself up for the upcoming competitions. If no, then you should adjust your goal accordingly.

2. **Engage a coach if necessary**

If your previous independent training did not bring you much progress, most likely it will keep being the same outcome in the future. It will NOT change, just because "you've set a new goal".

Do you know how business companies forecast their profits/losses for the following year?

Very simple: they look at the previous year. These past statistics are a trend and most likely will occur once again in the future. This is a realistic approach, based on facts, not hopes.

How many rating points have you improved in the previous year? There's a great probability that you'll keep the same speed of progress next year. If this level does not satisfy you, you need to engage a coach.

Let's keep it straight forward. Your results depend on the way you play, which is determined by your training. Hence, if you want to change (improve) your results significantly, **firstly you should change your training process greatly.**

It's very hard, almost impossible to do it yourself, and to change your habits. You need "a strong influence" from outside that can change your training significantly and boost your performance. In chess, this "strong outside factor" is a private coach.

A book or a video lesson can't cause this effect. You study it yourself, in the way that you used to do it before. Hence, you'll get the same results as before.

Again, you need this strong outside factor that will force you make the required changes. A coach can do this.

A coach can help you spot the weaknesses in your play and get rid of them. Let me provide a few typical examples.

EXAMPLE #1:

A lot of students wrote me about their "calculation problems", while in reality they simply blundered (which is a different thing).

EXAMPLE #2:

Many students were talking about "problems in a certain opening". While analyzing their games, I've seen that an evaluation of a position has been changing many times throughout the game.

Hence, there's no relation between the opening and the final result. In reality, those students had huge problems in positional understanding, not in the opening.

What do you think: can such a student rectify his errors?

Of course not –he does not even realize the actual errors.

I do agree that finding a good coach is hard.

What should you do if you can't find a good coach or can't afford one?

Then you may study one of my training courses. They are designed in a way that imitates your training with a coach: http://chess-teacher.com/shop/chess-courses/.

The bottom line: be honest with yourself. If your previous independent training did not bring great results, it will not change in the future. You must do something powerful to change the situation dramatically. Finding a private coach can be that strong solution.

3. **Play against stronger opponents**

Many players have a goal *"to become an IM (FM/GM, whatever)"*. When I ask such a person **how many tournament games have you played against IMs** so far, sometimes the answer is 0 (or close to that).

Look, it's ridiculous.

- Can you learn to swim without swimming (by reading books)?
- Can you learn a foreign language without talking to its native speakers?

It's impossible. In the same way, it's impossible to become an IM if you don't play against IMs regularly enough.

No matter whether you want to

or not, **you adapt your play to the level of your opponent**. So, it's very straight forward:

- Play against weaker opponents if you want to reach their level.
- Play against equal opponents if you want to stay on this level.
- Play against stronger opponents if you want to reach their level.

I know these sounds obvious, but why is it that so many players don't understand this?

If you set a goal for yourself "to become an IM within a year", you NEED to play a couple of games against IMs this year. Alternatively (better additionally), you may engage a private coach who is an IM. You'll interact with him a lot, which will give you this vital practice.

4. **Incorporate general goals into your daily schedule**

Perhaps you agree that you need to play more games against stronger opponents. It's great, but so what? This general idea does not produce any effect until you put it into practice.

When should you do it?

NOW! Nothing will change until you initiate it. If you want to progress now, then you have to take the necessary steps now.

You need to incorporate the general goals you have established into your daily schedule. And start working on them NOW. This is the only way to achieve them.

In this chapter, we've been talking about the ways to make your goals HAPPEN. We've also seen that, unfortunately, most chess players fail in achieving their goals. Well, it's not that chess players are so dumb. The same situation happens in all other spheres of life.

For instance, most new business ventures fail for lack of REALISTIC plans. An entrepreneur has had a certain "creative idea", but not a well-thought-out plan based on true facts, not hopes.

Business consultants often suggest decreasing planned sales by a factor of two and raising planned expenses by 10-40%, to make a business plan more realistic.

In this chapter, I've given you some tips to make your chess plans both realistic and achievable. Apply these ideas to chess and to other spheres of your life.

Once you have actually achieved your goals, don't forget to send me a message! I regularly publish "success stories" of the students of our Remote Chess Academy and will be pleased to add you into this "VIP group".

CONCLUSIONS:

A goal is a very general and partly emotional thing. It requires a solid, specific, well-thought plan to achieve it. This plan should be realistic, based on facts, not "hopes".

1. Plan your tournaments.
2. Engage a coach if necessary.
3. Play against stronger opponents.
4. Incorporate general goals into your daily schedule.

CHAMPION SPIRIT

Chapter 23
Champion Psychology from the Martial Arts

Use only that which works,
and take it from any place you can find it.

A goal is not always meant to be reached,
it often serves simply as something to aim at.
Bruce Lee

We know that in critical situations, some people demonstrate extraordinary performance, while others become feeble. **How can YOU adopt the right approach?**

Let's see how masters of martial arts overcome fear and nervousness. They take a serious risk while participating in sporting competitions. Thus, they need a really powerful technique.

By the way, chess is a model of war, so we may make this comparison.

I'll place a quote/idea from the martial arts (karate) in bold font and then will place a note on how you can adopt it in chess.

- **The real goal is not a champion cup in your hands, but the acquired value and qualities of yourself.**

We will look up towards wisdom and strength, not seeking other desires.

If you treat chess as a TOOL for training yourself, you'll be focused on the QUALITY of your games. Good results will come naturally.

On the contrary, if you are concerned with your rating, prizes, etc., this will distract you. Hence, you will not play well, despite your strong desire to do so. Moreover, in this case you will put extra psychological pressure on yourself.

By the way, this is a typical mistake made by parents with their chess-playing kids. Adults hope for and anticipate good results from their children. It's easily understandable.

However, a kid feels this psychological pressure. He/she knows that if

he does not perform well, he'll upset his parents. Maybe the parents will even criticize him for a lack of diligence, etc. In such a situation, a kid stops enjoying the game, feels nervous, and might even want to quit chess (unfortunately, I know such examples).

If you are a parent, let your child enjoy the game. Good results will come naturally.

If you are playing chess yourself, then you should focus on the quality of your games. And certainly you may enjoy the game as well.

- **Your opponent is an assistant who helps you overcome your weaknesses and reach your goals.**

  You would not be able to play without an opponent. A weak opponent can't compete with you really. Only a strong opponent can help you to learn something new and to grow. Facing stronger opponents more often can speed up your progress a lot.

We'll talk about your opponent in greater detail in other chapters.

- **You don't compete with others, but with yourself.**

Even though you want to win, in fact, you don't fully control the game's result (it depends on your opponent as well). What you really CAN do is to do your best, to play as well as you can.

Let me emphasize: I'm NOT saying that you should play perfectly, but only as well as you can today. Once the game is finished, analyze it. Detect your mistakes and decide how to correct your thinking system to avoid such errors in the future.

After that, set training goals for your next games/tournament. We'll talk about "training goals" in other chapters.

If you follow this method, every game will make you slightly better. This is great! Your goal is to be better than you were yesterday. Even a slight 1% daily improvement leads to an awesome 365% improvement in a year.

- **You should strive for the highest achievements, because they favor your advancement on your path of self-improvement.**

Getting a certain huge prize would certainly be pleasant. However, the real prize is the personal qualities you acquire along the way.

High achievements demonstrate your great intelligence and strong character. That's what you strive for.

Always play for a win. Don't accept a draw unless the position is totally drawish.

Always strive for the 1st place in a tournament. Someone else may be happy to take a draw in the last round, securing his 3rd place. However, you should cultivate your champion psychology. Seek the 1st place.

You should reach your goal; if you can't do it at the first attempt, do it at the thousandth go. The only thing that's important is not to give up.

This is a marathon, not a sprint.

Let's say you've tried a new opening variation and lost. Of course, it's unpleasant. However, you've got a valuable experience, you've learnt something new. It will positively affect lots of your future games.

When you look at "stars" like Magnus Carlsen, it may seem that everything came quickly and easily to them. Don't be deceived by that impression. Those "natural talents" devote their lives to obtaining their goal. They are training 10-12 hours a day. At 14 years old, such a "prodigy" might be spending more time on training than most adults.

Hence, if you can't achieve something today – don't worry. You just need to keep pushing and you'll get it later.

CONCLUSIONS:

Since these ideas help masters of martial arts to face hard battles, they will easily help in less risky situations.

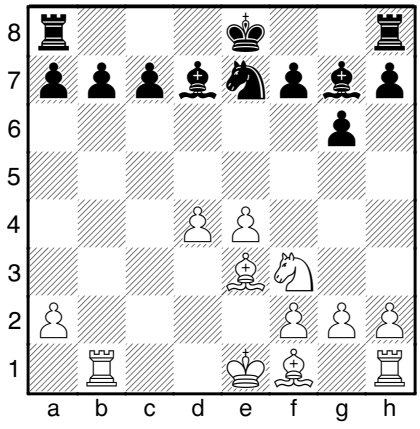
Find the concepts that resonate with you. After you adopt them, you'll enjoy chess even more and will improve your performance for sure.

Chapter 24
Chicken moves

The decisions you make are a choice of values that reflect your life in every way.
Alice Waters

Let's start with a practical example.

Ponomariov - Svidler



Black's turn

Imagine you are playing Black here. What move would you play now?

White has just moved his rook to b1, attacking your b7-pawn. How would you protect it?

You can castle queenside. In this way, you finalize your development, and the rook can work along the d-file in the future. However, you must be careful: in reply, White can attack your f7-pawn by playing Ng5 or Bc4. It may be dangerous for you.

Instead of castling, you can simply play b6. Here everything is protected for sure.

So, which move would you choose?

This type of situation happens very often. You can either play an ambitious but risky move, or choose a safer alternative.

Here's how the thinking process of an ordinary chess player goes:

1) First, he considers the most logical (the most ambitious) move – in our example, it's long castling.

2) Then he notices an unpleasant reply from his opponent's side (Ng5 or Bc4). It seems unclear and somewhat dangerous.

3) Finally, the player decides *"Ok, I'll play b6 instead of castling. Here I will not lose anything for sure, while in general the position remains approximately equal in either case".*

Hence, the person eventually plays b6. Again, this is a typical way of thinking, but there's a **HUGE FLAW** here!

When you are too timid to play the most ambitious move, you worsen your situation in three different ways:

1. Inwardly, you know that you have rejected the most powerful option because of your doubts. This undermines your self-confidence.

2. Your opponent sees that there's no reason to be afraid of you. You are not resolute enough to do something powerful against him. This raises your opponent's self-confidence.

3. You worsen your position slightly. Yes, nothing really bad happens to you instantly. However, you start going down. It favors your loss.

Taking this into account, a seemingly normal move, "b6", turns out to be a huge error!

One of my students called such a timid decision "a chicken move", and I like this definition. Probably you would prefer to associate yourself with a tiger or another "honorable" animal, but not with a chicken. If so, do NOT act like a chicken!

As usual, it's easier to say it than to do it practically. Once I explained this "chicken theory" to a student who suffered from this symptom. He fully agreed with me. However, in his next tournament, when he faced a Grandmaster, he played another "chicken move" and lost.

Finally, I had to issue an ultimatum to this student. I said: "If you make another chicken move in the next tournament, I'll stop training you. Why should I give you advice, if you don't follow it anyway"? This powerful measure worked and the student soon qualified for his first GM tournament.

You'll need to FORCE yourself to play the most ambitious, principled move (no matter how risky it might look). Apart from its chess value, it's a matter of your self-respect.

There are no "timid champions". You have to be a tough rival for your opponents. They should be afraid of you. They should know

that you will not hesitate to punish them whenever there's an opportunity.

Look at the world's best players, like Kasparov, Nakamura, Topalov. They always play boldly. They are always ready to go into risky, complex variations. Yes, sometimes it backfires, but more often than not it helps them to become a

CHAMPION!

CONCLUSIONS:

- Pretty often, you face a choice between an ambitious but risky move and a safer alternative. If this is the case, do NOT make a "chicken move"! It not only damages your position but your fighting spirit as well.

- There are no timid champions. Be tough for your opponents. Never play chicken moves!

Chapter 25
Dealing with failure in the manner of a champion

A failure is not always a mistake,
it may simply be the best one can do
under the circumstances.
The real mistake is to stop trying.
B. F. Skinner

Failure is the key to success;
each mistake teaches us something.
Morihei Ueshiba

Failure is frustrating, annoying, unpleasant… (you may paste any other negative adjective here). Still, we all experience it. Moreover, it happens much more often than we would wish.

Yes, we all know that we should take it in "a positive manner," but somehow it does work that way in reality, if you've actually lost.

- So, how to deal with failures?
- How not to get stressed but to keep your motivation?
- How to actually use failure for your future benefit?

We'll discuss all that in this chapter.

Firstly, let's me ask you one thing. Please, **remember how you got a certain skill** (it may be anything: writing, driving a car/bicycle, cooking, etc.).

1. Your first attempts were unsuccessful.
2. However, you trained and improved your skill level with every subsequent attempt.
3. After some time, you finally mastered this skill and started performing it well.

Now here's a question for you: **can we say that those first unsuccessful attempts were a failure?** Of course not! **They were only your necessary training, the steps on your way to success!**

Perhaps we would like to be successful at everything at our first go. However, it doesn't work like this in reality. (And it's good! Otherwise life would be too boring…)

Usually, chess players treat chess losses as something purposeless or even negative. However, **they are only a part of your road to success! Your every game, every win and every loss, is only a step on the way to your chess goals!**

If you don't limit your mind-set to today but have **a strategic vision** – if you think about the WHOLE pathway to your chess goals – then everything falls into place.

At the same time, there are **two necessary conditions here:**

1) **You should not "just play:" set training goals for yourself**

We've discussed training goals in previous chapters.

Your goal is to conquer yourself, to make today's performance better than it was yesterday. It will not happen by itself, of course. You need to consciously set a certain goal for yourself. It should answer clearly the question: **"What are you going to do better today, compared to your previous performance?"**

There's another idea that some players find very useful: ***"You don't lose, you either win or learn."*** You are welcome to use this approach, if you like it.

Nevertheless, I would put it little differently. You should learn from **EVERY** game, no matter what the final result is.

2) **You should analyze your game after playing it**

Thus, you will detect what you did right and what you did wrong (so that you can change the latter in your future training).

There's an important note here: try **to grasp "the big picture."** Most players do analyze their games, but do so superficially. Such a guy comes to a conclusion that the game was lost because he:

- Did not know (or forgot) an opening line
- Just blundered
- Got tired (or lost concentration) closer to the end of the game
- Or for another similar superficial reason Although such things are partly true, they don't reflect the REAL cause of

a loss. Let me reveal it for each of the cases mentioned above.

- Even if you did not know the opening line, you should have been able to play properly using your general chess understanding. If this did not work for you, it means that your chess understanding is lacking**.**

- If you suddenly blundered, it illustrates a lack of a solid system of thinking that will help you find proper moves all the time. It may also demonstrate a lack of calculation skills or problems with your tactical vision.

- If you got tired near the end of a game, well… your opponent probably got tired, too! Maybe it was not the main reason for your loss? Alternatively, you might have got tired because you were calculating too many unnecessary variations or were too nervous.

If you say, "I suddenly blundered in a winning position," you're trying to hide the real reason behind a loss. It's fine if you present it like that to other players, but you should be honest with yourself. You need to admit your errors, so that you can rectify them and play your next games in a stronger manner.

While talking about **"the big picture,"** it's useful to analyze your OVERALL performance as well (not focusing solely on one game).

I've had a lot of different students. When I start to train someone, I'm often shocked at the **OBVIOUS mistakes he/she makes.** I'll mention only a few examples (otherwise this chapter would be endless).

- A chess player spends quite a lot of time getting his openings in shape. While analyzing his/her games, I see that the evaluation of a position changes many times during a single game. That said, the final result bears no relation to his position after an opening!

The conclusion suggests itself: openings are not very important for this player at this stage; instead, he should eliminate his more significant weaknesses first.

- Another player spends time learning theoretical end-

game positions, BUT these never happen in his real games. Perhaps this is not the most effective training for him, wouldn't you agree?

- A third player solves thousands of tactical puzzles, while he almost never uses combinations in his real games. This should have forced him to change something in his training, right?

The list could go on and on…

Such mistakes look obvious (especially after I have explained them). T**hen, why do LOTS of players keep making them?** Simply, because they analyze every particular game but NOT their chess performance as a whole.

If you set training goals for your game and analyze it afterwards, this match will certainly become a very useful and positive experience for you.

CONCLUSIONS:

It requires a lot of attempts to master something. They are part of your necessary training, the steps on your way to success! "You don't lose, you either win or learn."

You will learn and get stronger with every game, as long as you:

- Do NOT "just play" but set training goals for yourself.

- Analyze your game after playing it. Grasp the "big picture." Be honest with yourself, even if you do say to your friends that you just "Blundered in a winning position."

Chapter 26
Victory over yourself of yesterday

Today is victory over yourself of yesterday;
tomorrow is your victory over lesser men.
Miyamoto Musashi

"I don't know how to conquer others; I know how to conquer myself."

This quote is from *Hagakure: Book of the Samurai*, but similar ideas are presented in different sources. Lots of people have heard this quote, but very few have actually put it into practice.

Yet, this is a REALLY POWERFUL concept. It can shift your attitude towards life… no kidding! Let's have a closer look at this old nugget of wisdom.

Nowadays, it's common to use "success" as a measure of your advancement in life. "Success" implies victories. You leave your competitors behind and enjoy the rewards of a champion.

However, let's be realistic. Most likely, there will always be some people ahead of you and some behind you. For instance, if we talk about chess, very few people have become world champion (over its whole history!).

Even if you are lucky to stand on this narrow pedestal, it's even harder to stay there for a long time. Kasparov had been dominating chess for a few decades: his 2851 rating seemed fantastic and unassailable for mere mortals.

However, not too long after, Carlsen reached 2882. In his interviews, the Norwegian star stated his current goal: to cross the 3000 rating! Everyone had been admiring Carlsen's phenomenal chess talent and domination until Caruana suddenly won seven games in a row in a 2014 super-tournament in St Louis, leaving Carlsen well behind!

The bottom line, once again: there will always be some people ahead of you and some behind you. From this perspective, it's really hard to say whether you are "successful" or not. No matter what your achievement is, most likely there will still be some people ahead of you. Does this make you a loser?

You see, there's something wrong with this whole concept. People talk about "success", forgetting that this is only a measure (a "milestone", as we put it in other chapters). What does it measure? **Your advancement on the path of self-improvement.** Now everything falls into place.

Let's say you have won a certain game. Ok, it pleases your ego for a little time. Then what? Is it really important for you that you are now ahead of "Mr Someone"? I bet not. **It's not about others, it's all about YOU.**

This drives us back to the initial idea: it's not about conquering others, but about conquering yourself.

This means you need to conquer your weaknesses, to make yourself better than you were yesterday. If these conditions are met – you may be totally satisfied and happy with your performance.

It might be interesting for you read a saying from an **Olympic Champion in running:**

"After a certain round, look into the mirror and say: 'I was running as good as I could.' Be happy and satisfied with your result, and then keep training. Don't put pressure on yourself (as you don't want that someone else puts pressure on you). Your efforts are the most valuable thing in life, not even the final result…"

Now let me also provide a continuation of the quote presented at the very beginning of this chapter:

"I don't know how to conquer others; I know how to conquer myself. Study diligently during your whole life. Today, you should become better than you were yesterday, next day – better than today. Improvement doesn't have a limit."

As we've discussed in other chapters, your opponents are only your training assistants who help you to progress. It's not about others: it's about you winning, and winning over yourself.

This idea is well summarized in Thomas Byrom's "rendering" of the *Dhammapada:*

"It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles. Then the victory is yours. It cannot be taken from you, not by angels or by demons, heaven or hell."

CONCLUSIONS:

1. There will always be some people ahead of you and some behind you. However, it's not about others – it's all about YOU.

2. Success is only a measure of your advancement on the path of self-improvement.

3. It's not about conquering others, but about conquering yourself:

   - Conquer your weaknesses.

   - Make yourself better than you were yesterday.

   If this condition is met – you may be totally satisfied and happy with your performance.

Chapter 27
TALENT

"Whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you are right".
Henry Ford
"Genius is 1% talent and 99% hard work…".
Albert Einstein

In this chapter, I'd like to discuss **chess TALENT**.

You know, I receive lots of messages from students. Quite often, people write something like:*"I think I just have not enough talent to become a 2300… player".*

While observing games during super tournaments, people often admire the genius moves played by the top players. I often hear comments like*"**Black's position was tough, but the genius Ivanchuk found the right way**".*

I've always been wondering what people mean by that. A LOT of people talk about chess talent. But here's the FUNNY thing: they usually can't even define what this "talent" is!

Let's try to clarify this idea. It looks like this:

There is a group of the best, dominant people. They are better than others "by default". They learn things quicker, perform better, and get greater results. Everything is easy for them because they are talented.

Also, there is a mass of "secondary" people (you are part of this mass). They have to put in a lot of effort, but will progress slowly anyway. Hence, this mass is doomed from the start. Their efforts will not change the situation too much. Is that what you mean by saying "chess talent"? Do you really believe it? I hope not, and I don't think you actually think like that.

Therefore, let me give you my views on"chess talent":

You say "chess talent" when you see another person who is ahead of you – and you can't really explain why this is so.

Am I right?

If so, don't worry. We'll discuss the true reasons in detail in this chapter.

However, let's first take a closer look at those "natural talents". Usually this term is applied to those who achieved their first big results at a very young age and then continued this quick movement to the top without any significant failure. You may have your own "chess heroes", but the following players are commonly recognized as being talented: Carlsen, Caruana, Nakamura, Karjakin, So.

Let's use Sergey Karjakin as an example. I know him personally (initially we lived in neighboring cities and often met at tournaments), so I can provide some true facts about him.

Karjakin holds the record as the youngest grandmaster in history (at the age of 12). At age fourteen, he defeated the reigning world champion Vladimir Kramnik in Dortmund.At 21, he was ranked #4 in the world.

Karjakin seems to be a true chess prodigy. You would want to have a similar smooth path to the top, wouldn't you? However, let me share with you a few less known facts about Karjakin's biography.

- His parents hired all the good coaches they could find.
- He spent a lot of time on chess training, starting at a very young age. He's the only person I know who studied the entire series of endgame encyclopedias as a child!
- Sergey took part in all the top tournaments. His father always accompanied him (I used to think to myself, "When does this man find the time for his own job"?).
- Karjakin didn't really study in a school or university. He dedicated all his time to chess.
- He traveled around the world to train with the best coaches.
- When he was of school age, he moved to another town which offered better possibilities for chess development.
- Later he moved to another country to join the Russian team and meet even better coaches.
- Even his first wife is a female grandmaster.

"From outside", those talented people seem to find progress easy. In reality, it required superhuman efforts and lots of sacrifices (both by this prodigy and by his parents). As you can see, talent alone doesn't help that much.

This brings us to the next, very important, question:

- What actually determines your achievements?
- How can somebody succeed in whatever endeavor?
- Why is it that some people win competitions in their chosen career (in sport, in any profession, etc.)?

FACTOR #1: The number ONE factor is **your enthusiasm**… that genuine desire to achieve that certain goal.

- Honestly, how many people will do EVERYTHING they can to be REALLY good at what they do?
- How many people strain every nerve and use 100% of their potential to succeed in their chosen career or sport?

NOT MANY. That's for sure. Maybe only 30% of people do so, and that's a very optimistic estimate if you ask me.

- How many chess players REALLY want to become World Champion (even amongst the 2600+ players who have a shot at it)?

Again, not A LOT. Most chess players just want to be a "good enough for the job" kind of guy and lead a comfortable life without too much stress.

With that in mind, **your GENUINE ENTHUSIASM already singles you out from most competitors and allows you to leave 70% of them behind!**

Ok, let's dig deeper and take a look at the remaining 30%. Of these, we have 30% who are highly motivated. Who will become the best of them all? Who will come out on top?

FACTOR #2:

The second most important factor is pretty obvious as well – it's your hard work. Let me provide a quote from an interview with former World Champion Viswanathan Anand.

Reporter:

People have this misunderstanding about chess that, you know, you need some incredible mental talent and you don't need to work really hard to get good at it.

Anand:

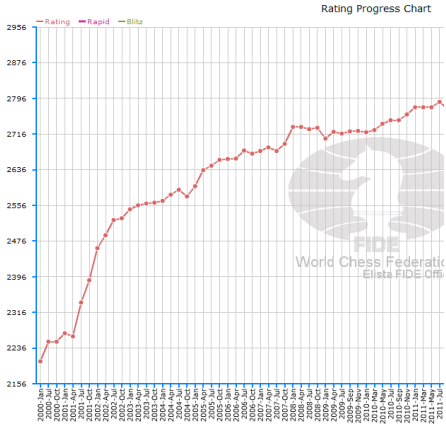
Well, it is true that people are unfamiliar with what goes into efficient chess preparation. You have to constantly train your skills. I mean, chess players are famous for calculating 20-30 moves ahead. That is SKILL! If you don't practice all the time, you start making mistakes.

This is pretty self-explanatory: the more you train, the better the results you'll achieve. Although this is certainly correct, there are some other important factors as well.

I know some players who have been studying chess for 8hours a day over many years and they are not even International Masters. On the other hand, we know quite a lot of very young players with a 2300-2600 rating. They could not have studied chess for many years, simply because their overall age is too low.

Thus, it's not just a matter of intensive training. So

What helps some players achieve FM/IM/GM titles quicker than others?



Those who don't know the answer to this question can still say: "*It's because of their talent*".

This reminds me of ancient people who explained lightning by saying,"*These are God's arrows*".

This is a good way to sidestep the question. If you prefer this approach – it's your choice. However, certainly we can provide a much more precise and clearer answer.

Look at the various team championships, Olympiads, etc.

W**hy are some teams always on the podium, while others cannot reach it?**

Obviously it's NOT because talent-

ed people are regularly born in particular countries.

So why do those teams keep winning?

The answer is actually quite simple: **some teams get greater results CONSTANTLY because they have a better system of training.**

Russia had an excellent "chess school" (in a broad meaning) in the past and continues to get good results from it. China is also developing its teaching system now (by inviting coaches from the former USSR).

Of course, a proper training régime brings good results – not only at the top level but also for beginner and intermediate players as well.

FACTOR #3:

This is the third most important consideration –your **training methods**. Obviously those who train more efficiently will move forward and experience better results MORE QUICKLY!

As for chess, the chess world really suffers from the lack of REAL chess school. Most chess players train randomly.

Maybe you are thinking: *"Come on, at least all GMs know the right methods"!*

Surprise! Surprise! A LOT of my GM (and GM-caliber) friends ask me how to train better. Even the best guys are not really sure about what's best and what's crap when it comes to methods.

Only a little portion– say 5% – of highly motivated players have the most effective training programs.

Now we have 5% of motivated, hard-working players. These guys combine the best training techniques with a genuine desire to play at their BEST.

So now we can ask:

- Who will become a champion?
- Here (and only here!) will it all come down to the next factor?

FACTOR #4

Your talent

For example, Beliavsky said that his chess progress was NEVER a smooth ride, and every inch of advancement required a massive amount of hard work from him. He lost a Candidates match to Kasparov (who was probably more talented). BUT, heck, Beliavsky played a

Candidates match for the World Championship title! That's not too bad, right?

BUT he did NOT say to himself: *"I don't have natural chess talent, I can't achieve anything real in chess".*On the contrary, he trained at chess for 8 hours a day and played for a win in EVERY game!

Adopt Beliavsky's approach and you'll get similar results.

Let me tell you one more thing. I've trained a lot of pupils from many different countries, from 6 to 65 years old, from poor students to a sheikh.

I can tell you this: all these pupils had pretty similar problems. The solutions were quite universal as well. That might not sound too nice to our ego –after all, we would prefer to consider ourselves as unique, creative, stand-alone personalities. However, we all have much more in common than it may seem.

If you suffer from unstable results, at times make oversights, don't feel comfortable under attack, get nervous in critical games, cannot always find a clear plan, etc… – well, the same goes for almost all other players!

Therefore, let's NOT overestimate the value of chess talent. There are not so many "Magnus Carlsens" around you. The vast majority of your opponents, 99% of them, are absolutely ordinary people, who don'thave any advantage over you.

Even if you believe that you don't have a talent for chess (which does not necessarily ring), 99% of your competitors don't have it either! Therefore, you should not bother thinking about "chess talent" at all.

I know some of you will argue: ***"Some people just have a better aptitude for chess"***.

A man with long legs has better prospects as a runner.

- Does this mean that others can't run?
- Can't others also improve their results in running?
- Can't they become professional sportsmen and run faster than the majority of people in the world?

You may be thinking, *"Yes, but a natural talent progresses faster"*.

I can tell you this: **the way you train, combined with your enthu-**

siasm, is a MUCH more important factor!

Don't overestimate the value of aptitude. And don't underestimate yourself!

You CAN improve your current results significantly and **realize MUCH greater progress than you originally expected!** I know PLENTY of such examples and publish news about them regularly.

Indeed, 95% of players underestimate their chess ability. Let's think why this happens.

People forecast future results based on their past performance. If you didn't get great chess results over the last few years, you can't believe that something will change suddenly. It's definitely logical, but not exactly correct.

If you have trained incorrectly for many years, then your progress is quite limited. However, it's NOT a matter of talent. Yes, if you stick to your usual training methods, you will keep getting similar results. **HOWEVER, you can change the way you think/train/play! Then you will get unexpected results!**

I know a lot of students who got great results SUDDENLY! They didn't expect these results and didn't believe they could do it.

It's important to mention one thing: **you need to be ready for CHANGES (<u>in your thinking process</u>)**. It's hard, but possible. And it's a necessary step for sudden great results!

It's a pity to see how many people spend/waste time on Internet blitz and tactical puzzles, and after that wonder why they are not progressing.

Luckily for chess players, they have <u>A Universal Lame Excuse</u> :

"*I don't have chess talent*". It's so convenient to say it. Now, it's not your fault anymore – you've somehow shifted responsibility to God. People like this psychological trick so much. Don't fall into this trap: it's for losers.

Everything is in your hands and thus you can change things for the better. This is a champion psychology!

To wind down, I'd like to share with you one of my favorite dictums. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius stated this about 2,000 years ago:

Because your own strength is un-

equal to the task, do not assume that it is beyond the powers of man; but if anything is within the powers and province of man, believe that it is within your own compass also.

CONCLUSIONS:

Your achievements are determined by your enthusiasm, the amount of time spent on training, and the training methods you use. The only person who controls all these factors is **YOU**. Accept fully the responsibility for your own chess achievements.

You can achieve two times greater results compared to what you consider a realistic goal for yourself.

You can change the way you think/train/play! Then you will get unexpected results!

Even if you believe that you don't have the talent for chess, 99% of your competitors don't have it either!

Chapter 28
Why do kids progress faster?

I think that inside every adult is the heart of a child.
We just gradually convince ourselves
that we have to act more like adults.
Shigeru Miyamoto

Today I received an e-mail from astudent. He asked me

"Why do children usually make better progress in chess than adults?"

Different people have asked me that many times already. A lot of adult chess players try to understand why they can't obtain good progress in chess for years, while children achieve such goals very quickly.

It is important to understand this question; because it will help you get on to the right road and to improve your chess skills quickly.

That's why this chapter deals with the topic: **"Children and adults in chess."**

I've had pupils from 6 to 65 years of age. So I can easily compare them and come to some conclusions.

Yes, I agree that children usually (but not always!) make better progress. There are three main causes of this:

1. **Children are in a more comfortable situation.** They don't have to earn money for a living, they have less work and responsibility, etc. Thus, young players can concentrate on chess and get better results.

However, this is not the main reason. An adult can focus on chess study as well and he/she can train even harder.

2. **Children are more flexible.** Please pay attention to the following very important idea: progress is **CHANGE** for the better.

There's a funny thing here. Everybody wants to progress, to achieve greater goals. At the same time, people are reluctant to accept changes in their life. We are so

accustomed to our habits that we don't want to reject them, even if our current way of acting does NOT produce the results we want.

Let me repeat the key idea: progress is inherently a **CHANGE**. If you want to get better results, be ready to change the way you think, train, and play.

Here are the typical mistakes relating to this issue:

- A player doesn't want to change his openings. Pretty often those openings are "outdated:" they were fine on an amateur level but don't work well against strong opponents. Anyway, a player is reluctant to reject the lines he has been playing for years.
- A player is not ready to change his playing style. There are lots of players who consider themselves "tactical/attacking" players, while in reality they are simply lacking strategic and endgame knowledge.
- A player doesn't make changes in his training methods, although his previous progress is at a far from desirable level.
- And the list goes on…

Such players keep their style of playing and training. Therefore, they achieve their normalresults as well. Certainly, they will have the same results for many years and will enjoy very little progress.

Unfortunately, this happens with some adult players, while children are usually ready to try something new.

1. Children trust what a coach says

I receive a lot of feedback from students who have studied my courses. Fortunately, most of the students report their success.

Sadly, there is also a percentage of them whose progress is not that great. Of course, I always ask these people to let me have more details about their training process.

The answers in such cases are very similar. They tell me something like this:

"I have studied this and that … lessons. The other lessonsdid not seem so important for me at this point, so I skipped them."

"I have not carried out the exercises from the practical part, because I want to study the videos from all

your courses first."

As you can see,students of this kind undertake only a little part of the training in the normal manner. They ignore and modify many important tasks. Of course, it is hard to expect good results with this way of going about things.

Children have trust in what their teacher says. They simply follow the teacher's recommendations. That's why they achieve good progress! However, adults sometimes prefer to focus on their own ideas.

You have to understand one thing :

- If you want to become a Grandmaster – you should follow the Grandmaster's recommendations.
- If you want to be an amateur player – you should follow the amateur's recommendations.

Now I have a question for you:

"If you are an amateur player and follow your own recommendations – what will you become?"

That's why I want to stress this idea: you should trust what a teacher says, even if you don't understand it (or think that it is not important, not necessary, not urgent, etc.).**"Just do it!"** And you will achieve your goals!

So far, I've provided a few arguments in kids' favor. However, there are lots of advantages that adults have. For example:

2. Adults have better strategic understanding

Children have a hard time with general, long-term strategic concepts. They need specific instructions and goals – then a kid can operate well.

Since chess is primarily a strategic game, this one fact can, by itself, equalize (if not overcome) all the points in kids' favor we've discussed above.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Progress is inherently a CHANGE (for the better). *"If you want something you've never had, you must be willing to do something you've never done."*
- Follow the advice of more advanced players. Just do it (even if a certain recommendation looks strange to you)! You need to imitate great players and adopt yourself to this new

level.

- Adults have better strategic understanding than kids. Use this point to your advantage if you need to play a game against a younger/older opponent.

- Similarly to kids, an adult also can make huge and quick chess progress (and I can tell you of numerous examples!). He/she only needs to have the right approach and the ability to apply some discipline to their chess training.

Chapter 29
Have fun!

Nothing is worth it,
If you aren't happy.

Why do you do what you do?

For instance,

Why do you work or study in a school/university?

Well, obviously we all need to earn money and make a living, that's true. However, it's not the only motive for your actions. It's not just about being alive; otherwise, we would not differ from animals.

Probably you want to live a meaningful life, care about your family, do things that you enjoy and thus – live a happy life.

Earning money is necessary, but it's not your real goal. Ultimately, you are going to use that money for living a happy life. That's the actual purpose.

However, while facing different issues, we usually get emotional. That makes us too concerned about given situation and thus we somewhat forget about the "big picture".

Once I played a tournament game against a famous Grandmaster. We played for a long game and became short of time closer to the end. When my opponent was left with 1-2 minutes for the remaining moves, he became so nervous that his hands were shaking.

After the game was finished (we drew), my opponent looked exhausted. Then a sudden idea came to my mind. When this person was a little kid, and was trying chess for the first time, he was probably excited about it. He used to have fun from playing such interesting games.

Why had he lost this perception?

When he grew up, he became too concerned about the result of his games, his rating, etc. He forgot the initial purpose,

Why he started playing chess?

The game is supposed to bring joy, to make you happy. Otherwise,

What's the reason for playing it at all?

Again, it's natural for a chess player to care about his rating, strive for a win, be upset about losses, etc. Unfortunately, those situational feelings can overshadow the "big picture".

You need to keep in mind that a game is supposed to bring you joy. That's why you are playing it. Each tournament, each game you play is an exciting event, an interesting challenge. So have fun! Remind yourself of this simple idea to make sure you stay on the right track.

There was a legendary ice hockey coach Tarasov. Under his guidance, the USSR team became winners of ALL international championships for nine years in a row!

During the hockey training, which is really tough, sportsmen were exhausted. When Tarasov noticed a tired face, he used to say to this person: *"Hey, what's up with your face? Have fun, you are in hockey"!*

The wise coach knew that great achievements are only possible when you do something with passion, when you enjoy it. Hence, Tarasov always reminded a sportsman to have fun, to enjoy the game he likes the most.

Coming back to chess, it is a really joyful and useful game for many reasons.

1. <u>You slow down aging</u>

Millions of dollars have been spent on scientific research into this question. They discovered one main (the most powerful) feature.

The main organ we all have is a BRAIN. Therefore, we should care about it above all. The main method to keep your brain in good shape is through **MENTAL ACTIVITY**.

Active mental work slows down the aging process by 40-60%! As usual, the greatest solution is the simplest.

In your everyday life, you perform <u>habitual</u> things most of the time. This does not require any hard thinking. So,

When do you really THINK?

Few people think more than two or three times a year; I have made an international reputation for myself by thinking once or twice a week.
George Bernard Shaw

And this is not a joke!

The game of chess is a great solu-

tion! While playing chess, you have to think constantly. You solve hard mental tasks over and over again. A time limitation factor forces your brain to work even harder!

That's how Smyslov, Korchnoi, Lilienthal and other famous Grandmasters have kept their mind sharp at a very venerable age.

2. **<u>You sharpen your mind</u>**, developing lots of important skills like planning, concentration, memory, and calculation

That's why children that study chess have better results in their school classes. Because of this fact, the chess game has been introduced into the school curriculum in European and many other countries.

Physical sport trains your muscles. Chess trains your brain.

3. **<u>You improve your overall understanding… of life!</u>**

Chess is NOT just a game, it's a model. By studying this model, we can discover some general rules. Then we can spread these strategic principles to any other sphere of life.

Let me make an analogy to another area. By the way, Socrates discussed it about 2500 years ago.

How do you understand people as a whole?

This is too huge and difficult a task. Instead, you can understand yourself, which should lead to a better understanding of people in general, since you are a typical representative of the latter. Deeply knowing yourself will lead to knowing everybody else around you.

In the same way, we can use chess (model) to understand general rules (in life).

4. **<u>Chess improves your psychological skills</u>**

A chess game/tournament creates a highly competitive situation for you. You need to have a strong character in such circumstances.

*"I developed my strong character by using chess" – said the fourth world champion **Alekhine.***

Chess gives you constant and objective feedback (your results, rating, your final standing in a tournament). It shows you clearly your psychological (mental) weaknesses. **Therefore, this gives you great possibilities for self-improvement** (as a chess player and as a person).

By the way, while reading this book, you are improving your psychological skills as well!

5. Chess is joyful, comfortable, and risk-free

Unfortunately, most professional sportsmen suffer various traumas. The runners and soccer players break their ligaments, boxers break their nose and teeth, basketball players damage their legs, tennis players overuse one hand and corresponding shoulder, etc.

I'm not criticizing those activities; in fact, I am a big fan of sport in general. Nevertheless, we have to confess that modern professional sport is so tough that it can overload a sportsman (leading to physical injuries).

Chess is an exciting challenge, a competition between two individuals and their brains. At the same time, it's absolutely risk-free. You play in comfortable conditions and enjoy the process.

6. You make new friends

I truly enjoy interacting with the people I work with in our Remote Chess Academy. They are absolutely great!

Also, I have friendly relations with lots of my students. They are smart and nice people.

This sort of communication is joyful and brings you new insights.

7. **You can travel around the world**

While participating in different tournaments

During my school age, I visited more countries than most adults do during their whole life. It's cool!

8. **You constantly learn something new and enjoy the beauty of chess**

Chess is a really interesting and infinite game. You can learn it for 50 years in a row and you'll still discover something new every day. Only at the end of this journey will you realize that you are… only beginning!

I've already provided a couple of great things about chess, and the list can go on and on. Keep this in mind while playing!

If you restrict your focus too much toone particular game and its result, you'll forget about the "big picture".

It's impossible to get great results without having a real enthusiasm and joy for chess. The world's

best players (like Aronian, Carlsen, Anand) treat tournaments rather like a HOLIDAY.

Yes, they put in a lot of effort while preparing and playing, **BUT they are excited about it. They are HAPPY about what they are doing**. And this is one of the keys to their success.

When you are focused solely on results, playing chess becomes an activity of nerves and training becomes your duty. Don't fall into this trap. It's impossible to achieve anything significant with a cheerless face.

Chess is an exciting GAME. **So keep having fun while training and playing!** Then your results will improve naturally.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Nothing is worth it if you aren't happy.
- Chess is a great and joyful game that gives you lots of benefits in many different ways.
- If you restrict your focus too much to one particular game and its result, you forget about the "big picture".
- Treat each tournament as a holiday. Have fun! Great results will come naturally.

Final word:
Making best use of the tools available

Things come to those who wait,
but only the things left by those who hustle.
Abraham Lincoln

Imagine that you've bought a book with recipes for cooking. How would you use it? Would you read it once and put it aside? I guess not, because otherwise you would not use this book at all. Instead, you'd probably be reviewing some chapters (recipes) when you decide to cook a corresponding dish.

The book "Champion Psychology" is a collection of psychological recipes. Of course, it's very good that you've familiarized yourself with them. However, I strongly recommend that you review certain chapters when you face the situations described there.

For instance, if your chess prospects don't seem promising to you – review the chapter "Make a legend of yourself." Follow its advice. This will bring your enthusiasm and self-confidence to the top level, which will affect your results positively.

If you've suffered from time troubles – reread the chapter "Summary about TIME." It will bring you back on track.

I hope you've got the idea. **USE the recipes from this book**. Whenever there's a challenge, apply the corresponding recipe. This will help you get 100% benefit from this book. Most importantly, you'll enjoy real progress and improvement in your results!

By the way, there's NO need to apply all recommendations presented in this book. It's absolutely fine to select a few methods that fit you the best. BUT you need to use these tools diligently and put them into practice. It's not about quantity, it's about **quality**.

If you follow this advice, you'll make yourself a better chess player and a better person. **Your chess is a reflection of yourself – it's your auto-portrait.**

For instance, if one calculates the same variations many times, it's not a chess problem really. In fact, one needs to address the personal underlying reasons for indecision.
Bad news – transforming yourself is a more complex process than you might expect. However, you have all the necessary tools in this book, so everything will be easy for you.

Good news – this transformation will bring a great positive influence to bear on all facets of your life.
Although you play chess, it's actually not about chess, but about YOU. The game of chess is a great tool for developing your mental power and champion psychology. Through this book, you've learnt how to make this "nice abstract idea" your reality!

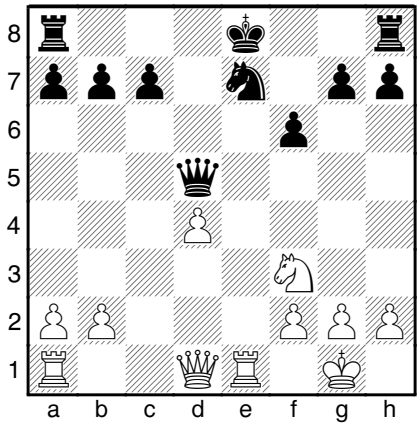
Having a champion psychology does not guarantee you constant victories (nothing does!). Instead, it does help you perform at your best possible level, while enjoying the process. This ensures that you will enjoy a happy life and ultimate victory!

Games

(1) Steinitz Wilhelm (CZE) - Von Bardeleben Kurt (GER) [C54]

Hastings (England) Hastings (England) (10), 1895

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 Bb4+ 7.Nc3 d5 8.exd5 Nxd5 9.0–0 Be6 10.Bg5 Be7 11.Bxd5 Bxd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Bxe7 Nxe7 14.Re1 f6



15.Qe2 [This natural move turnes out to be a mistake!]

[15.Qa4+ Kf7 (15...Qd7 16.Qb4 and Black can't protect both e7–knight and b7–pawn) 16.Ne5+ ! breaking through the Black's defense 16...fxe5 17.Rxe5 with a decisive attack]

15...Qd7 16.Rac1 c6 [?]

[16...Kf7 although White has an interesting sacrifice: 17.Ne5+ ! 17...fxe5 18.dxe5 Qe6 19.Qf3+ Kg6 20.Rxc7 with good attacking prospects]

17.d5 [!]

17...cxd5 18.Nd4 Kf7 19.Ne6 Rhc8 20.Qg4 g6 21.Ng5+ Ke8 22.Rxe7+ [!!]

22...Kf8 [22...Kxe7 23.Re1+ Kd8 (23...Kd6 24.Qb4+ Kc7 25.Ne6+ Kb8 26.Qf4++–) 24.Ne6+ Ke7 25.Nc5+ White is winning]

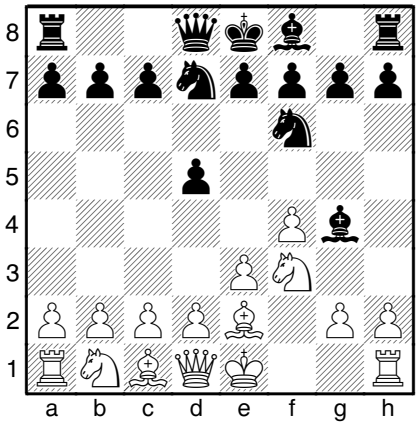
23.Rf7+ Kg8 24.Rg7+ Kh8 25.Rxh7+ Kg8 26.Rg7+ Kh8 27.Qh4+ Kxg7 28.Qh7+ Kf8 29.Qh8+ Ke7 30.Qg7+ Ke8 31.Qg8+ Ke7 32.Qf7+ Kd8 33.Qf8+ Qe8 34.Nf7+ Kd7 35.Qd6#

1–0

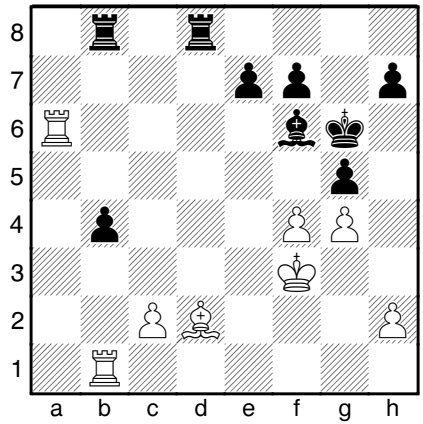
(2) *GM_Vovk (2640) - *GM_Kramnik (2760) [A03]

Qatar Open 2014 Doha, Qatar (5), 2014

1.f4 d5 2.Nf3 Bg4 3.e3 Nd7 4.Be2 Ngf6



5.Ne5 Bxe2 6.Qxe2 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.Qb5 Rb8 9.Nxd7 Qxd7 10.Qxd7+ Kxd7 11.d3 b5 12.a3 c5 13.e4 dxe4 14.dxe4 Kc6 15.Bd2 b4 16.axb4 cxb4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5+ Kxd5 19.Rxa7 Bxb2 20.Ke2 Rhc8 21.Kd3 Bf6 22.Rb1 Rd8 23.Ke2 Ke6 24.Ra6+ Kf5 25.Kf3 g5 26.g4+ Kg6



27.Rxb4 [? leads to a very unpleasant position for White]

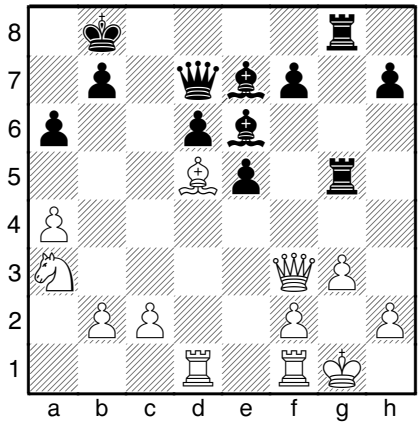
[27.Bxb4 ! threatening Be7, exploiting a pin 27...e6 28.f5+ exf5 29.Be7 Black is able to hold a draw, but not more than that 29...fxg4+ 30.Kg3 Rxb1 31.Rxf6+ Kg7 32.Bxd8 Rd1]

27...Rbc8 28.Be3 gxf4 29.Rxf4 e6 30.Ra5 Rc3 31.Rc5 Rxc5 32.Bxc5 Rc8 33.Bf2 Rc3+ 34.Kg2 Rxc2 35.Kg1 Be5 36.Rf3 f6 37.h3 h5 38.gxh5+ Kxh5 39.Rd3 Bf4 40.Kg2 e5 41.Ra3 f5 42.Kf1 e4 43.Ra5 Kg5 44.Ra3 Bc7 45.Rb3 Bd6 46.Rb5 Kf4 47.Rb3 Bc5 [Black wins] 0–1

(3) Smirnov (2446) - Manesku (2331) [B33]

Youth European Championship (6), 2003

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.a4 Be7 8.Bg5 a6 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.Na3 f5 11.exf5 Bxf5 12.Bd3 Be6 13.Be4 Nb4 14.Qh5 Qd7 15.0–0 0–0–0 16.Rad1 Rhg8 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.Bxd5 Rg5 19.Qf3 Rdg8 20.g3 Kb8



21.Nc4 [The knight is extremely well-placed, aiming at a5, b6, d6 or e3 square.]

21...Qc7 [21...Bg4 22.Qb3 Bxd1 23.Rxd1 White has a powerful compensation for the exchange. Na5 move is coming.]

22.Ne3 R8g7 23.c4 Bxd5 24.Nxd5 Qc6 25.b4 Bd8 26.b5 Qxc4 27.Ne3 Qf4 28.Qg2 Qxa4 29.Rxd6 Bc7 30.bxa6 e4 31.Rf6 R5g6 32.Rxg6 fxg6 33.axb7 Kxb7 34.Rb1+ Kc8 35.Qf1 Be5 36.Nc4

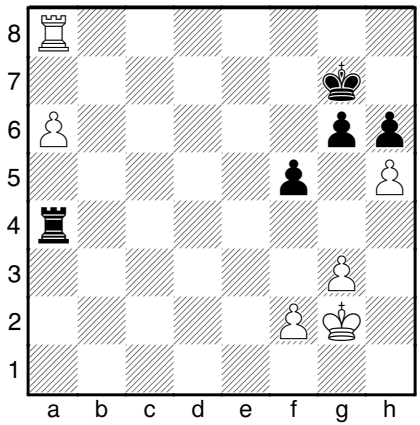
Bc7 37.Qc1 Kd8 38.Qc3 Re7 39.Ne3 Be5 40.Qc5 Ke8 41.Nd5 Rd7 42.Nb6 Rd1+ 43.Kg2 Qd4 44.Qb5+ Kd8 45.Rxd1 Qxd1 46.Qxe5 Qf3+ 47.Kh3 h5 48.Qd6+

1–0

(4) Ponfilenok (2255) - Smirnov (2455) [E15]

Chigorin Memorial (5), 2005

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4 b6 4.g3 Ba6 5.Nbd2 Bb4 6.Qc2 Bb7 7.Bg2 Be4 8.Qd1 0–0 9.0–0 Bxd2 10.Qxd2 d6 11.b3 Nbd7 12.Bb2 Qe7 13.Qc3 c6 14.Bh3 Rac8 15.Nd2 Bg6 16.Rae1 d5 17.Bg2 Rfd8 18.e4 dxe4 19.Nxe4 Bxe4 20.Bxe4 Nxe4 21.Rxe4 Nf6 22.Re5 Nd7 23.Re4 Nf6 24.Re5 Nd7 25.Re3 Qf6 26.Rf3 Qg6 27.Re1 Nf6 28.Rf4 b5 29.Qf3 bxc4 30.bxc4 Rb8 31.Bc3 Ne8 32.Kg2 Rbc8 33.Re5 f5 34.Qe3 Nc7 35.Ba5 Qf7 36.Bxc7 Rxc7 37.Rxe6 Rf8 38.Qe5 g6 39.d5 cxd5 40.cxd5 Qg7 41.Qe3 Qc3 42.Qxc3 Rxc3 43.Re7 Rf7 44.Rxf7 Kxf7 45.Ra4 Rc7 46.Ra6 Rd7 47.h4 Rxd5 48.Rxa7+ Kf6 49.a4 Rd4 50.a5 Ra4 51.a6 h6 52.Ra8 Kg7 53.h5



53...g5 [?]

[53...gxh5 would equalize the material, giving Black an easy draw. 54.a7 otherwise Black would play h4, exchanging his doubled pawn. 54... Ra2 55.Kf3 Ra4 56.Ke3 Ra3+ 57.Kd4 Whenever White tries to advance his king, Black starts a counterplay on the king-side. 57...f4 ! 58.gxf4 h4 Black's h-pawn plays a key role! It's a draw.]

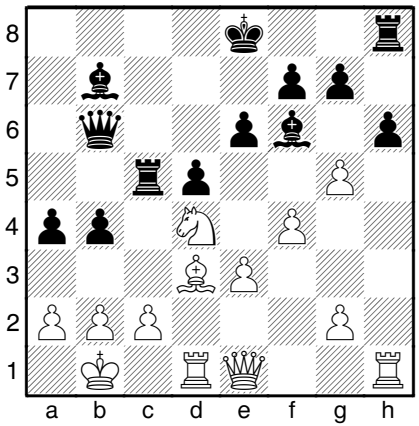
54.Ra7+ Kg8 55.Kf3 Ra5 56.Ke3 Re5+ 57.Kd4 Re6 58.Kd5 Rb6 59.f4 gxf4 60.gxf4 Rf6 61.Kc5 Re6 62.Kb5

1–0

(5) Smirnov Igor (UKR) (2446) - Yagupov Igor (RUS) (2331) [D01]

Round Robin (5), 2002

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.Bg5 Nbd7 4.Qd2 e6 5.0–0–0 h6 6.Bh4 c5 7.e3 a6 8.Kb1 b5 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bd3 Bb7 11.Nf3 Rc8 12.Ne2 Be7 13.Bg3 Nc5 14.Ned4 Nfe4 15.Qe1 Nxg3 16.hxg3 Bf6 17.Nd2 Qb6 18.N2b3 b4 19.Nxc5 Rxc5 20.f4 a5 21.g4 a4 22.g5

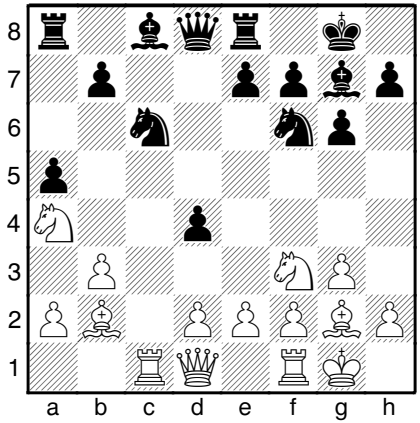


22...hxg5 [??]

23.Rxh8+ 1–0

(6) Svidler,Peter (2743) - Mamedyarov,Shakhriyar (2757)

Sochi Tal Memorial Blitz Sochi (18), 2014



12.Rxc6

! This sacrifice gives white two pawns and activity for an exchange.]

12...bxc6 13.Nxd4 Nd5 14.Nxc6 Qd6 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Qa1+ [White manages to obtain a powerful knight on c6. This positions is very good for white since he also managed to exchange black's dark squared bishop.]

16...Nf6 17.Qc3 Bb7 18.Nb6 Ra6 19.Nc4² [White's activity gives him more than enough compensation. white has a good position.]

19...Qe6 20.N4xa5 Bxc6 21.Nxc6 Rxa2 22.Bf3 Rc8 23.b4 Qd6 24.d3 Rxe2 25.Bxe2 Rxc6 26.Qb2 Qc7 27.Bf3 Rc2 28.Qd4 e5 29.Qe3 Rb2 30.Qc5 Qxc5 31.bxc5 Rc2 32.c6 Rc3 33.Bg2 Ne8 34.Rb1 Nc7 35.Be4 Ne6 36.Rb7 Kf6 37.Bd5 Rc5 38.Rd7 h5 39.h4 Rc3 40.Kf1 Rc2 41.Ke1 Rc5 42.Kd2 Ra5 43.Kc3 Rc5+ 44.Kb4 Rc1 45.Bc4 Rb1+ 46.Ka5 Rb8 47.c7 Rc8 48.Kb6 Rf8 49.Bxe6 [Don't be afraid to sacrifice material. In the middlegame the most important factor is the activity of the pieces.]

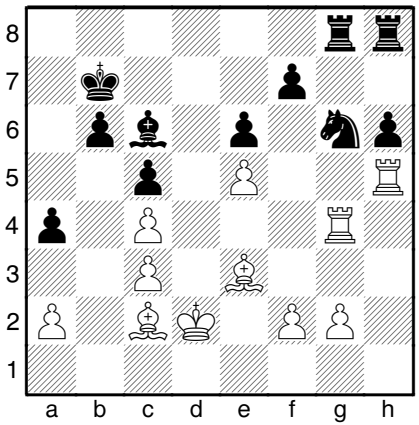
1–0

(7) Magnus Carlsen - Viswanathan Anand [B41]

Carlsen-Anand World Championship Sochi RUS (6), 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Bb4 7.Qd3 Nc6 8.Nxc6 dxc6 9.Qxd8+ Kxd8 10.e5 Nd7 11.Bf4 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Kc7 13.h4 b6 14.h5 h6 15.0–0–0 Bb7 16.Rd3 c5 17.Rg3 Rag8 18.Bd3 Nf8 19.Be3 g6 20.hxg6 Nxg6 21.Rh5 Bc6 22.Bc2 Kb7 23.Rg4 a5 24.Bd1 Rd8 25.Bc2 Rdg8 26.Kd2 [?? White overlooked simple tactics]

26...a4



? And Black missed it as well...]

[26...Nxe5 ! 27.Rxg8 (27.Rxe5 ? 27... Rxg4 loses easily) 27...Nxc4+ 28.Kd3 Nb2+ 29.Ke2 Rxg8 Black ends up with 2 extra pawns]

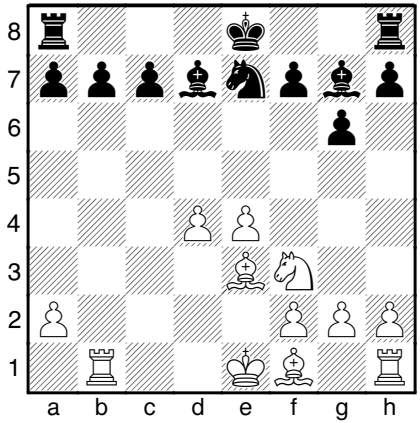
27.Ke2 a3 28.f3 Rd8 29.Ke1 Rd7 30.Bc1 Ra8 31.Ke2 Ba4 32.Be4+ Bc6 33.Bxg6 fxg6 34.Rxg6 Ba4 35.Rxe6 Rd1 36.Bxa3 Ra1 37.Ke3 Bc2 38.Re7+

1–0

(8) Ruslan Ponomariov - Peter Svidler [D85]

World Cup Khanty-Mansiysk RUS (6), 2011

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 Nxc3 6.bxc3 Bg7 7.Qa4+ Bd7 8.Qa3 Nc6 9.Nf3 e5 10.Be3 exd4 11.cxd4 Qe7 12.Qxe7+ Nxe7 13.Rb1



13...0–0–0 [! Black is protecting b7–pawn while finalizing development.]

[13...b6 14.Rc1 White has more active position]

14.Bc4 [14.Ng5 Be8 White's d4–pawn is attacked]

14...f5 15.Ng5 fxe4 16.Nf7 Nf5 [Black gets strong passed pawns for the exchange]

17.0–0 Nxd4 18.Bxd4 Bxd4 19.Nxh8 Rxh8 20.Bd5 b5 21.Bxe4 c5 22.g3 a5 23.Kg2 b4 24.Bd5 Kc7 25.Bc4 Kd6 26.Rfe1 a4 27.f3 Rb8 28.Re2 Bf5 29.Rd1 b3 30.axb3 axb3 31.g4 Bd7 32.Re3 b2 33.Rb3 Rxb3 34.Bxb3 Bb5 35.Ba2 Kc6 36.Rd2 Kb6 37.f4 Bc6+ 38.Kg3 Be4 39.Rd1 Kb5 40.Re1 Bd3 41.Re7 c4 42.Rd7 c3 43.Rd5+ Bc5

0–1

Useful Resources

Below you can find links to some useful resources that will support your chess improvement. Also, you can get in touch with me and share any feedback or questions.

http://chess-teacher.com
The main website of Remote Chess Academy contains everything for your chess improvement.

https://www.youtube.com/user/GMIgorSmirnov
Lots of free video lessons – made by me and other well-known coaches – are waiting for you on our YouTube channel.

Stay in touch with me and get lots of news, puzzles, cool quotes, etc… on our social media pages:
Facebook / https://www.facebook.com/RemoteChessAcademy
Google+ / https://plus.google.com/+GMIgorSmirnov/
Twitter / https://twitter.com/gm_smirnov

Free training course, "Quick Success in Chess":
http://chess-teacher.com/free-training-course/

Finally, you can get all the support you need, or send me a message, via our support zone: https://chessteacher.zendesk.com/home

See you! ☺

Champion Psychology

We live in a world of tough competition. Here you need to demonstrate top performance under stressful circumstances. Moreover, you're required to excel in every battle, without any slip-ups.

This book will help you stay cool and do your best, while enjoying the royal game of chess. You'll learn the most common psychological weapons that top Grandmasters use.

Although the book seems to be about chess, in fact, it's about YOU and your champion psychology. Hence, it will improve your performance in any sphere of life, including chess.

Remote Chess Academy
http://chess-teacher.com

Here you can study lots of high-quality
FREE lessons and join our community.

9 781942 104353